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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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NIA arrests 2 from B'desh in K'taka for human trafficking

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested two absconding Bangladeshi nationals in a human trafficking case, the agency said on Friday.The arrest of Mohammed Sajjid Haldar and Idris takes the total number of arrests to 14 in the case.As per the NIA, the accused were arrested from Karnataka following a massive search operation conducted by its officials. "Investigations have further revealed that Idris had also set up a waste collection and segregation unit at Anadapura, Bengaluru, where he had leased out land and set up tents for more than 20 Bangladeshi families, who were suspected to have been trafficked by him. Investigations to corroborate these details are continuing," said the NIA. *—ANI*

India, Maldives & Sri Lanka take part in joint Navy drill

Male, 23 Feb

Seeking to enhance maritime security and interoperability, coast guard personnel from India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka have embarked on a four-day trilateral exercise to identify emerging maritime challenges in the Indian Ocean Region. Indian Coast Guard ship Samarth and ICGS Abhinav along with Sri Lanka Naval Ship Samudura reached here on Thursday for the exercise DOSTI-16' that would be held between 22 and 25 February. Bangladesh is participating as an observer. Coast guard helicopter ICGS Dornier too is part of the trilateral exercise Dosti,' which Sri Lanka said aims to enhance cooperation, strengthen friendship, improve mutual operational capability. *—PTI*

Indian firm faces EU sanctions over exports to Russia

LONDON, 23 FEB

A company registered in India along with others registered in Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Turkey are among those facing export restrictions under new European Union sanctions announced on Friday. The latest sanctions were announced to mark two years of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the second anniversary Under the latest package of EU sanctions, companies making electronic components -- which the 27-nation European bloc believes could have dual military as well as civilian uses -- are among the companies facing restrictions. *—PTI*

18 Indian fishermen freed by Lanka court

COLOMBO, 23 FEB

Eighteen Indian fishermen who were held for allegedly poaching in Sri Lankan waters earlier this month have been released, officials said on Friday. The fishermen were arrested on 7 February off the coast of the Delft islet in Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka. The magistrate in Jaffna while freeing the 18 fishermen on Thursday also ordered six months imprisonment for two drivers of the boats used for illegal fishing. The boats were ordered to be confiscated. The fishermen had pleaded guilty when they were produced in court. The magistrate ordered their repatriation with assistance from the Sri Lankan Navy and the Indian Deputy High Commission office in Jaffna. *—PTI*

Cops use tear gas on farmers; Haryana revokes NSA order

A plea in SC alleges violation of protesting farmers' right by govt

HISAR/CHANDIGARH, 23 FEB

As fresh clashes broke out, the Haryana Police on Friday used tear gas to disperse protesting farmers heading towards Khanauri on Punjab's border with the state.

Haryana Police also said it is withdrawing its earlier decision to invoke provisions of the National Security Act (NSA) against some farmer leaders who are a part of the ongoing farmers' agitation.

This comes a day after Ambala police issued a statement saying it was implementing the process of detaining office bearers of the protesting farmer outfits under section 2(3) of the National Security Act, 1980, to maintain law and order and prevent criminal activities.

Farmers will stay put at the two protest sites on the Punjab-Haryana border till 29 February when the next course of action will be decided, their leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said on Friday.

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) observed a "black day" on Friday and burnt effigies of BJP leaders in protest against the Haryana Police's action against agitating farmers camping at two of the state's border points.

The call was given by the SKM on Thursday to mourn the death of Shubhkaran Singh, who died in clashes between the Haryana Police and farmers from Punjab.

Meanwhile, a petition has been filed in the Supreme Court alleging violation of the rights of the "peacefully protesting" farmers by the Centre and some states.

The plea claimed that the Centre and some states have issued "threats" and fortified the national capital's borders, after several farmer unions called protests.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha are spearheading the 'Delhi Chalo' march to press the government to accept their demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) for crops and a farm loan waiver.

On Friday, a few protesters threw stones at police personnel when farmers from Kheri Chopta village near Hisar in Haryana were stopped from going to Khanauri where farmers, mostly from Punjab, have been camping since last week after their march was halted by the security forces.

A clash between police personnel and farmers ensued, forcing Haryana security personnel to fire tear gas shells. Some police personnel and farmers were injured in the clash, officials said, adding some farmers have been detained. Bharatiya Kisan Union's Hisar unit president Golu Data alleged that besides using tear gas, the police also resorted to lathicharge and turned on a water cannon against the farmers. He criticised the state government for the police action.

Farmers are now holding a sit-in to protest against the police action, Data said. A heavy police force has been deployed to maintain law and order in the area. Meanwhile, Farmer leaders demanded a "martyr" status for Singh. *—PTI*

A farmer participates in the 'Black Day' protest at Shambhu border, in Patiala on, Farmers are observing Black Day' following the death of a farmer at during their ongoing protests *PHOTO: PTI*

Farmer dies of heart attack at Khanauri border

Chandigarh, 23 Feb

A 62-year-old farmer, who was part of the 'Delhi Chalo' agitation, died of heart attack in Khanauri on the Punjab-Haryana border, a farmer leader said on Friday. Darshan Singh was a native of Amargarh village in Bathinda district, said Sarwan Singh Pandher. A 72-year-old farmer, part of the same agitation, had earlier died of cardiac arrest. Another 63-year-old farmer died of a heart attack at the Shambhu border. *—PTI*

DKS rules out law on MNCs displaying number of Kannadigas

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has ruled out the possibility of a law that forces MNCs in State to display the number of Kannadigas working on their campuses.

Bengaluru is a hub for global citizens and the government doesn't have any such plans. "Bengaluru is a global city open for all to come and work," he said on Friday.

Shivakumar said the display of the number of Kannadigas was a demand of Kannada activists. "Some Kannada activists approached our Cultural Minister and proposed a plan to table a law. That's why the minister said. It's impossible to implement such laws," Shivakumar said.

Earlier, Minister for Kannada and Culture Shivaraj S Tangadagi told the legislature that all MNCs operating in the State must display the number of Kannadigas employed on their notice boards. Failure to comply with this requirement could result in the revocation of permissions granted to these companies, he added. *—Salar News*

TARGETS RAHUL IN VARANASI

Oppn instigating people in name of caste: Modi in UP

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting, in Varanasi, Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

VARANASI, 23 FEB

In a relentless attack on the Opposition, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said it was instigating people in the name of caste and making them fight and also hit out at Rahul Gandhi for his "drunk men" on Varanasi roads remark, saying those not in their senses are terming the youth "nasheri".

On a two-day visit to his parliamentary constituency Varanasi, Modi spoke at a function to commemorate the 647th birth anniversary of Sant Ravidas, interacted with winners of the 'Sansad Sanskrit Pratiyogita' at the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), and inaugurated and laid the foundation of several projects worth more than Rs 13,000 crore before addressing a public meeting.

At the rally, he said, "Members of Congress' 'shahi-parivar' are calling the youth of Varanasi 'nasheri' (intoxicated)," without naming Gandhi.

Gandhi had recently said that in Varanasi he observed some youths inebriated, lying on the streets, and dancing at night. The future of youths of Uttar Pradesh is intoxicated, he had said.

"They have spent two decades abusing Modi and are now venting their frustration on youths. Those who are not in their senses themselves are calling children of my Kashi drug addicts. No one will forget this insult of the youngsters of Uttar Pradesh by the INDI alliance," Modi said.

He went on to say, "They also don't like the new form of Ayodhya and Kashi at all. See what kind of things they say about Ram Temple in their speeches." *—PTI*

Byju shareholders vote to oust CEO, his family

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Raveendran *PHOTO: X/ SANATHANIWOKE*

Majority of Byju's shareholders on Friday voted unanimously for removing founder CEO Byju Raveendran and his family from the board over alleged "mismanagement and failures" at what was once India's hottest tech startup. However, the company dug in its heels, calling the voting done in absence of founders as invalid and ineffective.

Founder CEO Raveendran Byju, his wife and brother - the only three members on company board as of now - stayed away from the extraordinary general meeting (EGM) called by a group of six investors, who collectively hold more than 32 per cent in Think & Learn (T&L).

At the end, more than 60 per cent of the shareholders voted in favour of all the seven resolutions, which included removing the current management, reconfiguration of the board and a third party forensic investigation into acquisitions done by the company. Prosus - one of the six investors who had called the EGM - in a statement said "shareholders unanimously passed all resolutions put forward for vote.Sources with direct knowledge of the matter said the EGM was to start at 9.30 am on Friday but was delayed for almost an hour as around 200 people, some of them Byju's employees, sought to join the virtual meet.

Only after due verification the investors were let in, they said, adding some 40 people representing the investors were allowed in and voted on the resolution moved by some investors. *—PTI*

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REDUCED TO ASHES

Around 30 to 40 auto rickshaws and other few vehicles were gutted in blaze at an open plastic scrapyard at Gangondanahalli near Nayandahalli in Bengaluru on Friday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

BILL TO 'TAX' HINDU TEMPLES DEFEATED IN KARNATAKA LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

BENGALURU, 23 FEB:

Hindu Religious and Temple Endowments (Amendment) Bill, 2024, was defeated in Karnataka Legislative Council on Friday.

During the voting, 18 BJP and JD(S) MLCs voted against the Bill and only seven members favoured it.

However, Muzrai Department Minister Ramalinga Reddy, who worked on the Bill which aimed to benefit poorer temples said, "We will put it forth again in the Assembly on Monday," he said while coming out of the Council. *—Salar News*

BILKIS' CONVICT GETS PAROLE TO ATTEND WEDDING

AHMEDABAD, 23 FEB

Gujarat High Court on Friday granted 10-day parole to Bilkis Bano case convict Ramesh Chandana to attend his nephew's wedding scheduled for 5 March.

Chandana, who moved High Court for parole last week, is the second convict in the case to be granted parole after all 11 convicts in the case surrendered at a jail in Godhra town on 21 January following a Supreme Court order.

They were convicted in a case of gangrape of Bilkis Bano and the murder of seven of her family members during the 2002 Godhra riots.

As per the Gujarat government's affidavit before Supreme Court, Chandana had enjoyed parole for 1,198 days and a furlough of 378 days since his incarceration in 2008. *—PTI*

Defamation: City court summons RaGa, CM

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

A city court on Friday summoned former Congress President Rahul Gandhi, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar to appear personally before it on 28 March a case filed by BJP.

Special judge J Preeth also directed the registration of a criminal case against the accused persons, including the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee.

BJP had accused the Congress leaders of putting out false advertisements against its party leaders, including the then Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai.

During the Karnataka Assembly elections last year, Congress accused BJP of "40 percent corruption" and placed several advertisements in newspapers alleging corruption by the then ruling party.

Also, a poster campaign was launched targeting Bommai by displaying 'PayCM' posters with the then CM's images across the city. Congress also published a 'corruption rate card' against the former government.

BJP filed a defamation case against the Congress leaders after the Assembly elections, alleging that the advertisements damaged the party's image. *—PTI*

PROTESTERS DEMAND ACTION

Fresh violence breaks out in Sandeshkhali

KOLKATA, 23 FEB

Fresh protests rattled the troubled enclave of Sandeshkhali in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district on Friday, as enraged locals vented their ire by torching the property of TMC leaders accused of tormenting villagers besides staging demonstrations against perceived police inaction towards the perpetrators.

During the unrest, residents barricaded roads with logs and set them on fire to block the entry of police vehicles into Jhupkhali area of Sandeshkhali. Tensions persisted for the second consecutive day, with reports of TMC leaders being assaulted and their residences being ransacked.

Responding to the situation, Director General of Police (DGP) Rajeev Kumar, for the second consecutive day, went to the troubled region and pledged firm action against those responsible for the unrest. Armed with sticks, protestors set fire to thatched structures near a fishing yard in Belmajur, directing their anger towards the elusive TMC leader, Shahjahan Sheikh, and his brother Siraj. One of the torched structures belonged to Siraj, it was revealed.

"For years, police did nothing. That is why we are doing everything to reclaim our land and honour," a demonstrator said.

Subsequently, law enforcement personnel intervened and tried to pacify the agitated crowd. Later in the afternoon, DGP Kumar arrived in the locality and engaged in discussions with the locals.

Members of Sangrami Joutha Mancha hold placards during a protest against Sandeshkhali case, in Kolkata *PHOTO: PTI*

Villagers beat TMC leader with slippers As Sandeshkhali continued to be on the boil, protesters broke through fences and physically assaulted Trinamool Congress leader Ajit Maity on Friday in the presence of media crew.

Visuals from the site showed villagers ransacking Maity's house and beating him with slippers as protests continued in the Bermajur area of Sandeshkhali where angry villagers clashed with the police on Friday. Villagers in Bermajur also tried to prevent police vehicles from passing through the area."Is there any law and order in this country? Police tried to run over a girl. If the public had not known the girl would have died," another protester said, speaking to ANI.—*ANI*

FORMER M'RASHTRA CM MANOHAR JOSHI DEAD

MUMBAI, 23 FEB

Former Lok Sabha Speaker Manohar Joshi and Shiv Sena's suave face at a time when the party was known for its rustic and street politics, passed away at a Mumbai hospital on Friday.Joshi,86, was admitted to Hinduja Hospital in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) on 21 February after suffering cardiac arrest and passed away early Friday.His last rites were performed with full state honours in the presence of former chief ministers Sharad Pawar, Sushilkumar Shinde and Uddhav Thackeray. Condoling his death, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Joshi was a veteran leader who spent years in public service and held various responsibilities. *—PTI*

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Metro to boosts connectivity with short loop trains

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) is introducing two initiatives to improve travel during peak hours and early morning, starting from 26 February. Short-loop trains will operate between Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Station (Majestic) and Garudacharpalya Metro stations, according to a press release. This will help commuters bound for Indiranagar, Benniganahalli, and KR Puram stations. This means trains will be available every three minutes between 8.45am and 10.20am, offering faster connections for those heading towards these areas. The service will be available on weekdays only, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.In addition to this, the metro will also cater to passengers arriving early in the City via Indian Railways or intercity buses. BMRCL will now launch its first train from Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Station towards all destinations at 5.00am. This service will run on all days except Sundays, offering convenient onward travel for those arriving early in the morning. These initiatives aim to address specific commuting needs. The short-loop trains cater to the heavy morning traffic towards IT hubs, while the early morning service benefits those arriving from outside the city for work or other purposes. *-PTI*

Actor Darshan faces backlash for bad remarks

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

Kannada actor Darshan is caught up in a controversy after making two separate remarks deemed offensive. During a public event celebrating his 25th year in the film industry, Darshan commented on women, saying "Today she is there, tomorrow another, why should I worry?" This statement sparked outrage with Gowdathiyara Sene writing to the Women's Commission demanding action.Darshan also drew criticism for his use of the term "tagau" (scrap) on producer Umapathy Srinivas Gowda. The Rajya Okkaligar Sangha condemned this remark, highlighting its disrespectful nature.The Gowdathiyara Sene's letter expressed concern about the influence of Darshan's words on young people, fearing a negative impact on their attitudes towards women. They emphasised the need for Darshan to change and advocated for respectful treatment of women both on and off-screen. He previously served jail time for domestic abuse and made insensitive comments about Lakshmi, the Goddess of Luck.
—Salar News

MLC Vishwanath wants to contest LS polls

MYSURU, 23 FEB

Former Congress minister AH Vishwanath said on Friday that he wants to contest from Mysuru-Kodagu constituency in Lok Sabha elections this year. "I have served as an MP and minister in the same party, and I am qualified for this opportunity," he said. This marks the first time that Vishwanath openly declared his candidacy for the Lok Sabha election.Vishwanath urged State government to request Centre to honour posthumously Devaraj Urs and Shivakumar Swamiji of Siddaganga Mutt with Bharat Ratna award. The Congress leader advocated for implementing reservation in the cooperative sector.Reflecting on the recent Legislative Council election, Vishwanath said the results of Teachers Constituency election serve as a bellwether for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. He hit out at BJP State President BY Vijayendra over State treasury and temple funds. Vishwanath asked the BJP leader to check the fiscal condition during the BJP government's tenure before criticising Congress government on it.
—Salar News

Congress to check in all MLAs in hotel ahead of RS polls

BEGALURU, 23 FEB

Apparently aimed at keeping the flock together ahead of Rajya Sabha polls, all ruling Congress MLAs in State will stay put together at a hotel here on Monday after the Budget session concludes. They will later also travel together for voting the next day.

This was revealed by Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, also the state Congress President, while speaking to reporters on Friday about the biennial election to fill four vacancies from State in Rajya Sabha by the elected MLAs on 27 February.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has called the Congress legislature party meeting at 3.30 pm on Monday in the presence of AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala and party treasurer Ajay Maken.

Arrangements have been made to take all the MLAs together from the hotel to the Vidhana Soudha, the seat of the state legislature and secretariat here, in a bus for voting on Tuesday, party sources said.

Eight party leaders including two Ministers have been assigned for coordination with MLAs, they said.

Rajya Sabha election scene in Karnataka has heated up with BJP-JD(S) combine fielding its second candidate, even though the alliance has the strength to win only one out of the four seats.

The ruling Congress, whose strength is 135 in the 224 member Assembly, along with the support of Darshan Puttanaiah from Sarvodaya Karnataka Paksha and two Independents, is expected to retain the three seats.

BJP and JD(S) with 66 and 19 members, respectively, are in a position to together win one seat. Each candidate has to get 45 votes to win, if there are only four candidates in the fray, but in case of more candidates, preference votes kick in.

On JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy reportedly discussing Rajya Sabha polls with Union Home Minister Amit Shah during their meeting in New Delhi on Thursday, Shivakumar said, "There is no need to worry. We know what we have in our quiver, they too are aware of what we have."

"We are aware of what discussions they have done, we are also aware of which MLA they are making phone calls and what they are talking to them. All MLAs are telling us. They are trying to contact them through their relatives and friends and others, we are aware of it. We have our watch on every one from all parties," he said. Asked whether Congress MLAs have received calls from Delhi, the KPCC chief said he wouldn't like to comment on it now. *—PTI*

Arrangements have been made to take all the MLAs together from the hotel to Vidhana Soudha in a bus for voting on Tuesday ***PHOTO: SALAR***

- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has called the Congress legislature party meeting at 3.30pm on Monday in the presence of AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala and party treasurer Ajay Maken.

Oppn creates uproar in Assembly

BJP, JD(S) protest against govt passing resolution against Centre

The session will end on Monday ***PHOTO: SALAR***

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

Opposition BJP and JD(S) protested against Congress government over the passing of resolutions targeting Central government which rocked Legislative Assembly proceedings on Friday, forcing adjournments.

Opposition demanded that the government withdraw the resolutions passed on Thursday which urged the Union government to make sure that no injustice is done to the State in the allocation of financial resources and to frame legislation regarding fixation of MSP for all crops of farmers.

BJP and JD(S) MLAs chanted 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Modi Modi' in the Assembly to protest against the Siddaramiah-led government. The Opposition leaders created a song saying, "Siddaramaiah government is cheychey (brush it away) and Siddaramiah economy is cheychey." They targeted Congress over the Budget saying it would lead the State to more debt.

Amidst the chaos, two bills were passed in the Assembly on Friday without debate. Karnataka Legislature (Prevention of Disqualification) Bill, 2024, and Karnataka Land Revenue (Amendment) Bill, 2024, were passed amid BJP and JD(S) members shouting slogans against the government from the well of the House.

Karnataka Legislature (Prevention of Disqualification) Bill amends the 1956 Act which makes provisions to exempt the office of the Advisor to the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister, Chairman or Member to any Commission and the Vice Chairman of the State Institute for the transformation of Karnataka from incurring disqualification for being an MLA or MLC on such appointment.

According to Karnataka Land Revenue (Amendment) Bill, 2024, if an MLA is not interested in being a member of Bagair Hukum Committee, the State government is empowered to nominate any resident of the constituency as a member of the committee. The present provision of the act says the member of the Assembly has to be one of the members of the committee.

However on the last day of the Assembly on Friday, the discussion was to be held on the reply to the State budget and the passage of the finance bill. Chief Minister was not available for the discussion due to health reason and the session will end on Monday. *—Salar News*

- Karnataka Legislature (Prevention of Disqualification) Bill, 2024, and Karnataka Land Revenue (Amendment) Bill, 2024, were passed amid BJP and JD(S) members shouting slogans against the government

Ashoka reads out counter resolution

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

Leader of Opposition **R Ashoka** read out a "counter resolution" against the resolution brought against Centre by State government. But it was not considered or put to vote as due procedures were not followed, the Speaker said. Ashoka said the resolutions were brought against the Central government all of a sudden and unilaterally, without bringing it to their notice or discussing it at the BAC meeting; it was also not mentioned in the agenda. "Why did the government bring the resolution in a hush-hush manner, despite having a majority in the House? They could have mentioned it in the agenda and introduced the resolution openly as per procedure. We too would have put forward our stand and objections against the resolutions. Assembly and its rules have been insulted," Ashoka said while demanding the resolutions should be withdrawn. Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil, who had moved the resolution on Thursday and Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda defended the government's action. "I condemn the Opposition's objections to the unanimous voice of seven crore people of the State and resolutions have been moved and passed as per law and there is no question of withdrawing it. You (Opposition) introspect whether you are for Karnataka's interest or want to do politics," the minister said. Gowda said BJP's 25 MPs in Lok Sabha from Karnataka never raised any issue in the interest of the State in Parliament. This led to heated arguments between both sides.
—Salar News

Assembly sees spirited talks on 'Neera'

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's remarks on Neera, a sap extract from coconut inflorescence, sparked uproar discussion in the Legislative Council on Friday.

During the Question Hour, Congress MLC BK Hariprasad raised concerns about businesses suffering due to the ban on arrack in the State and sought assistance from the government.

When the Opposition leader in the Council, Kota Srinivasa Poojary interrupted, Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar asked Poojary if he had ever tried Neera. Poojary replied, "The thought crossed my mind, but I wasn't sure if I could handle it. I might have braved it if I were as physically robust as you!" Adding to the humour, Hariprasad said, "Poojary doesn't indulge, but he's quite the influencer!" Meanwhile, BJP MLC Tejaswini suggested, "You should document your Neera experiences in 'Neera Diaries'."

Poojary highlighted the plight of communities reliant on the arrack business and advocated for the establishment of Neera outlets under the Mysore Sales International Limited.

In response, Shivakumar acknowledged Poojary and Ravikumar's concerns for their community on the potential for bottling and selling tender coconut at a premium.

However, he cautioned against hasty decisions, citing the significant impact of past liquor regulations on the industry.
—Salar News

Case filed against RS polls candidate

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

Vidhana Soudha police on Friday registered a First Information Report (FIR) against D Kupendra Reddy, the fifth candidate of BJP-JD(S) alliance for Rajya Sabha polls, and three others for allegedly trying to induce Congress MLAs to cross vote.

They have been booked under sections 171 E (punishment for bribery) and 170F (punishment for undue influence or personation at an election) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of IPC.

Congress MLA P Ravi Kumar Gowda (Ganiga) in a petition submitted to Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda on 20 February, had alleged that Reddy approached him and a few independent MLAs to cross-vote in the polls on 27 February. The FIR said Reddy and three associates Ravi, Mahantesh and Shivashankar among others approached a few Congress MLAs with offers of bribes and threats. The police are currently questioning the candidates named in a complaint.

According to Kumar's complaint, a person approached independent MLAs Lata Mallikarjun, Puttaswamy Gowda and Darshan Puttanaiah with offers of cash on behalf of Reddy. *—Salar News*

Fire breaks out in plastic unit, vehicles gutted

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

A major fire erupted at a plastic waste shredder unit in Gangondanahalli, near Nayandahalli, Bengaluru, on the early morning of Friday, causing significant damage and leaving several people with a huge loss. The fire department received an alert at 1:57am and promptly deployed five fire tenders to the scene. While the blaze was ultimately brought under control, it caused extensive damage.

According to the Nagarbhavi Fire department, the plastic waste shredder unit is owned by Rizwan, and it also functions as a parking lot for vehicles like auto rickshaws, goods vehicles, and pushcarts at the cost of Rs 30 per night.

A fire and rescue personnel told Salar News "The fire is suspected to have originated from an electrical short circuit. It quickly spread through the compound, engulfing at least 26 auto rickshaws, one car, and multiple pushcarts parked on the premises. There was many plastic waste scattered on the premises which we suspect was the reason the fire spread so quickly."

Locals described the scene as chaotic, with some attempting to save vehicles by moving them away from the inferno. However, the fire's intensity prevented many from salvaging their belongings.

Ismail Sheikh, a local resident, told Salar News "I woke up by 1:30am and heard the commotion outside. When I checked it, the fire had already crossed the compound and I alerted the fire department. Me and many other residents tried to save as many vehicles as we could but we could not save many of them at that time." People who have incurred loss due to damage of vehicles have appealed to the authorities for compensation to help them recover from this devastating loss.
—Salar News

While the blaze was ultimately brought under control, it caused extensive damage ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Mandya MP Sumalatha Ambareesh ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Will fight against illegal mining: MP

MANDYA, 23 FEB

Mandya MP Sumalatha Ambareesh said she will continue her battle against illegal mining near KRS Dam despite getting life-threatening calls.

The relentless pursuit led to High Court imposing a ban on mining activities in the region, Sumalatha said at the final Disha meeting of her tenure at Cauvery Bhavan of Zilla Panchayat in Mandya.

Regarding the controversy surrounding her Delhi trip and former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy's statement on it, Sumalatha said, "Let him say what he wants. We have been awaiting such orders, and nothing can be confirmed until the final decision is reached (on Lok Sabha elections)." The MP said she might explore alternative options if necessary, emphasising her commitment to serving the people.

About the trial blast at Baby Betta at Srirangapatna, Sumalatha said the interests of farmers must be prioritised. Highlighting the adverse effects of trial blasts, she affirmed her solidarity with the Raitha Sangh in their efforts to obtain a stay order against the blasts.
—Salar News

Property tax defaulters can opt for one-time settlement

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

State government has announced a 'one-time settlement' (OTS) initiative for property tax defaulters in Bengaluru, providing relief for overdue payments under the jurisdiction of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). The OTS requires payment of outstanding tax amounts along with accrued interest and penalties for tax evasion. According to the directive issued by HS Shivakumar, the under-secretary to the Urban Development Department, residential properties with tiled or sheet roofs (non-RCC) not exceeding 1,000 sq ft for personal use and having only a ground floor will face a penalty of 25 per cent on evaded taxes.

However, certain exceptions apply, as there will be no penalties imposed on slums, government housing facilities for the economically disadvantaged, and residences smaller than 300 square feet declared as slums by the Karnataka Slum Development Board or BBMP.

The notification will remain in effect until 31 July of this year. Additionally, the BBMP (Amendment) Act, 2024, recently passed by the Legislative Assembly, aims to slash penalties for property tax violations in Bengaluru by nearly half. Penalties will now be applicable for a maximum of five years, with interest waived for dues beyond this period.

Deputy Chief Minister and Bengaluru Development Minister D K Shivakumar hailed the passing of the bill, estimating that it would save Bangaloreans Rs 2,700 crore in penalties. The BBMP is expected to recover penalties worth Rs 1,000 crore as a result of these measures.
—Salar News

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

City to host National Saras Mela from 29 Feb

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

In a bid to empower women and promote self-reliance, the State will host National Saras Mela and a trade fair at National College ground here from 29 February to 9 March.

The fair aims to showcase the talent and products of over 250 women self-help groups from across the country. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Skill Development and Livelihood Minister Sharan Prakash Patil, MLAs ST Somashekar, Srinivas and senior officials were present during the launch of the logo for the mela here on Friday.

Beyond product display, Namma Saras Mela facilitates knowledge sharing and capacity building for women entrepreneurs. Daily sessions will address topics like product quality improvement, food processing, and market strategies, empowering participants to enhance their offerings and reach new customers. "The future of the country depends on the women and youth. These small-scale businesses started by thousands of women in our country will be the future success of our country," Shivakumar said. "We have seen many of the big-scale businesses take over and make a profit in our country. Now it is time we recognise our own people's talent and hard work and give them the chance to come forward in life. We do not realise it yet, but it is our own resources that these foreign businessmen use to make something new and sell it to us. If we start to make use of these resources by ourselves, it can take our country to another level," Shivakumar said.

Highlighting the variety of offerings that will be present at the Mela, Patil said, "The variety of handicrafts and food products produced by SHGs across Karnataka will be exhibited and well-known artistes will also perform."
—Salar News

DCM DK Shivakumar, Minister Sharan Prakash Patil during logo launch of National Saras Mela in Bengaluru on Friday. ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Modi in Bengal on 1, 2 and 6 March

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be in West Bengal on 1 and 2 March as part of his official programme and is expected to address a women's rally on 6 March in the North 24 Parganas district, where restive Sandeshkhali is located. Modi's visits in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls come amid an intense political row involving BJP and the state's ruling Trinamool Congress after several women in Sandeshkhali accused the regional party's strongman Shajahan Sheikh and his supporters of "land-grab and sexual assault". There has been speculation that Modi may meet some of the complainants during his visit to Barasat, the headquarters of North 24 Parganas district. Two of Sheikh's aides, who along with others were booked under charges of gang rape and attempt to murder, have been arrested. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X/ NARENDRA NARAYAN YADAV

JD(U)'s Yadav elected Bihar Deputy Speaker

PATNA, 23 FEB

Senior JD (U) leader Narendra Narayan Yadav was elected unopposed as the deputy speaker of the Bihar assembly on Friday. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, and several Opposition leaders congratulated him after he was elected for the post. Talking to reporters outside the assembly, Yadav said, "I am thankful to our leader of the House and other NDA leaders for providing me this opportunity. I have assured all legislators of the House that I will remain impartial while delivering the constitutional duty." The newly elected deputy speaker also said all Opposition members were asked not to create disturbances during the question hour. Yadav, a former state minister, has been representing the Alamnagar seat of Madhepura district since the 1990s.*—PTI*

CPI(M) leader hacked to death in Kerala, one held

KOZHIKODE, 23 FEB

A CPI (M) leader was allegedly hacked to death by his neighbour on the premises of a temple near Koyilandi. PV Sathyanath, 60, was attacked by Abhilash, 35 using a sharp weapon at around 10.30pm on Thursday. As per the preliminary reports, the murder took place due to personal rivalry. A case under various provisions of the Indian Penal Code, including section 302 has been registered. Abhilash allegedly hacked Sathyanath inside the temple, where a festival was going on. Abhilash surrendered himself at the police station. He was taken into custody, police added. Meanwhile, CPI (M) has called for a dawn-to-dusk hartal at Koyilandi in the wake of the murder.*—PTI*

BRS MLA Lasya Nanditha dies in road accident

HYDERABAD, 23 FEB

Opposition BRS MLA in Telangana G Lasya Nanditha died in a road accident at Patancheru near on Friday. The incident occurred at around 5.30am today when the car she was travelling in hit a metal crash barrier on Outer Ring Road (ORR) resulting in her death, police said. The car's driver suffered injuries in the incident. The 36-year-old first-time legislator from Secunderabad Cantonment (SC) was shifted to a hospital where the doctors declared her dead on arrival. Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, BRS chief K Chandrasekhar Rao, state BJP president G Kishan Reddy, and several Telangana ministers and leaders condoled the death of the young legislator. *—PTI*

Leaders not to cremate dead ryot until govt files FIR

Meanwhile, Punjab CM announced Rs 1 crore aid, job for victim's sister

CHANDIGARH, 23 FEB

Farmer leaders participating in the 'Delhi Chalo' agitation on Friday said the cremation of Shubhkaran Singh, who died amid clashes between Haryana Police and Punjab farmers, will not take place till the Punjab government registers a case against those responsible it.

The development came hours after Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann announced a compensation of Rs 1 crore and a government job for Shubhkaran's sister.

Subhkaran Singh, 21, a native of Bathinda, died on Wednesday at Khanauri border point on the Punjab-Haryana border amid clashes between Haryana Police and Punjab farmers. The incident took place when the farmers rushed to the barricades, several layers of which had been erected by Haryana authorities to prevent farmers from proceeding with their march, and clashed with police.

According to the medical superintendent of Patiala-based Rajindra Hospital, Subhkaran had an injury to his head. The post-mortem was delayed as the farmers pressed for acceptance of their demands. Speaking to reporters in Patiala, farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said the Punjab Chief Minister had asserted that stringent action would be taken against those responsible for Shubhkaran's death. But now the officials are saying that it was not possible, the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha leader said. Replying to a question, Jagjit Singh Dallewal, leader of SKM (Non-Political) that is spearheading the 'Delhi Chalo' march along with the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, claimed the senior Superintendent of police of Bathinda has said that police could not register a case against Haryana security personnel.Asked about the next course of action on the call for the march to the national capital, Pandher said, "We will hold a meeting and make our stand clear."

Farmers leaders were also demanding "martyr" status for Shubhkaran Singh.

—PTI

Farmers take part in a candlelight vigil in tribute to a farmer who was allegedly killed in Police action at Khanauri border during their 'Delhi Chalo' march, in Patiala on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Haryana waives interest on crop loans in Budget

CHANDIGARH, 23 FEB

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Friday announced a waiver of interest and penalty on certain crop loans and did not hike taxes as he presented a Rs 1.89 lakh crore budget for the 2024-25 financial year.

While announcing the budget proposals at a time when farmers have intensified their protests at Punjab-Haryana borders, Khattar asserted that his government has taken many steps for the welfare of the farmers and that Minimum Support Price (MSP) is being given for 14 crops.The government has also decided to double the financial compensation to Rs 1 crore for families of soldiers who die in the line of duty.

In a major announcement, Khattar, who also holds the finance portfolio, said that interest and penalty will be waived on crop loans taken by farmers from Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS).

—PTI

M'RASHTRA TALKS ON TOO

After seat sharing with AAP, Cong eyes TMC deal

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Congress is hopeful of soon finalising the Lok Sabha poll seat-sharing arrangements with INDIA bloc allies AAP and TMC, sources said on Friday, days after the principal Opposition party arrived at an understanding with the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh.

Sources said while the talks with the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP have almost been concluded, discussions are still underway with the Mamata Banerjee's TMC.

The sources expressed hope the leadership would work out a solution soon accommodating the expectations of all parties.

TMC, which is the ruling party in West Bengal, has sought two seats in Assam and one in Meghalaya, which are being discussed. But a senior leader said Congress is not keen to give away the Meghalaya seat. There are 14 seats in Assam and two in Meghalaya.

As for the understanding with AAP, the talks between the two parties are almost over with AAP contesting four seats in Delhi and the Congress three.

However, the sources said AAP has also sought one seat in Haryana and two in Gujarat which included Bharuch, where the late Congress leader Ahmed Patel hailed from. AAP has already declared Chaitar Vasava as its candidate on the seat.

The sources, however, said Rahul Gandhi is learnt to have put his foot down on the seat considering the party is "emotionally attached" to due it being Patel's home turf.

Patel's son and daughter are seeking a ticket from Bharuch and talks are being held with AAP leadership to agree to another seat.

INDIA bloc parties are together and will fight the polls in alliance, the sources said.

A senior party leader also said that seat-sharing talks in Maharashtra are over after top party leadership held discussions with leaders of Shiv Sena (UBT) Uddhav Thackeray and NCP supremo Sharad Pawar in the MVA.

The sources said a formal announcement is delayed because of seats to be given to Prakash Amvedkar's party.

—PTI

Sanatan Dharma eradication is Oppn's campaign, says BJP

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Sudhanshu Trivedi **PHOTO: ANI**

BJP on Friday launched a broadside on Opposition parties over the alleged targeting of Hindus in West Bengal, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, claiming this shows that the assertion about the eradication of 'Sanatan Dharma' is not merely a statement but part of a campaign.

BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi hit out at West Bengal's Trinamool Congress government for not allowing his party's leaders, including a group of women comprising legislators and others, to visit trouble-torn Sandeshkhali and not arresting Shajahan Sheikh, a local TMC strongman. Trivedi said that it was not only about the West Bengal government protecting him but there was a particular mind-set that believes in "secular protection" of some people irrespective of the crimes and atrocities they commit.Citing a new law passed in Karnataka which mandates that the state government will collect 10 per cent of the income of temples that have revenues of more than Rs 1 crore show that the "eradication of Sanatan Dharma is a campaign".

—PTI

ED raids absconding TMC leader's aides

KOLKATA, 23 FEB

Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday conducted raids at residences of businessmen allegedly associated with absconding Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Shajahan Sheikh in connection with an old case of fraudulent land grab, a senior officer said.

Raids and search operations were started by ED early Friday morning at five different places in and around the city including Howrah, Bijoygarh and Birati, he said.

ED officials accompanied by a huge number of central forces started searches at an address in Howrah's Haldarpara at the residence of fish trader named Parthapratim Sengupta, the officer said.Raids are underway at four places including the house of local businessman Arun Sengupta at Birati in North 24 Parganas district and at the residence of Arun Shome in the southern part of the city's Bijoygarh area.

"These traders also are involved in export and import businesses with Shajahan. We are talking to them to find out the nature of their trading and how Shajahan was involved in it," the officer said.

Meanwhile, ED on Friday issued fresh summons to Shajahan in connection with his alleged involvement in the multi-crore ration scam.

ED opposes Sheikh's anticipatory bail plea

ED opposed an anticipatory bail prayer made by Trinamool Congress leader Shajahan Sheikh before a Kolkata court in connection with the agency's probe into an alleged ration distribution scam in West Bengal, claiming that he is a very influential person.

The judge reserved judgment on the anticipatory bail prayer of Sheikh following the conclusion of submissions by both parties.The agency's counsel, Deputy Solicitor General Dhiraj Trivedi submitted before the court that Sheikh is a very influential person and grant of anticipatory bail to him would severely affect the investigation.He has not been seen in public since the mob attacked ED officials when they went to search his premises on 5 January. *—PTI*

BJP MP detained en route to Sandeshkhali

KOLKATA, 23 FEB

Kolkata Police on Friday stopped and detained Bharatiya Janata Party MP Locket Chatterjee when she, along with other party leaders, were on their way to trouble-torn Sandeshkhali.Amid the prevailing tensions in Sandeshkhali, a team of women BJPleaders was supposed to depart for Sandeshkhali on Friday.Meanwhile, a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) team reached the Sandeshkhali area on Friday to ascertain facts through a "spot-enquiry" into the incidents of violence in the North 24 Parganas islands. *—ANI*

PRIYANKA TO JOIN NYAY YATRA IN MORADABAD

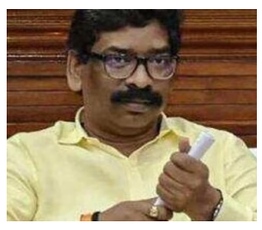
NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will join Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Moradabad on Saturday and will be part of it for the remainder of its Uttar Pradesh leg over the weekend.Senior Congress leader Kamal Nath will also take part in Madhya Pradesh leg of Rahul Gandhi-led 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra'. Nath recently was at the center of speculation that he and his Chhindwara MP son Nakul Nath were planning to join the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

Priyanka would accompany Rahul from Moradabad and travel through Amroha, Sambhal,, Hathras, Agra, concluding at Fatehpur Sikri on Sunday, the party said. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav is set to join the yatra in Agra on 25 February. *—PTI*

Soren moves HC seeking nod to participate in Assembly session

JHARKHAND, 23 FEB



Hemant Soren **PHOTO: PTI**

Former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren on Friday moved an application before the state's high court, seeking permission to participate in the budget session of the assembly.

A special court in Ranchi had earlier denied permission to Soren to take part in the session that got underway on Friday.

JMM leader was arrested by Enforcement Directorate (ED) on 31 January in a money laundering case.

Soren mentioned in his petition that his presence is important in the House, as several money bills will be subject to voting by the assembly members.

ED sought time to file a response to Soren's plea, and the high court fixed 26 February as the next date of hearing.

Soren had filed a petition before the special PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court for permission to participate in the budget session.

—PTI

HC REFUSES TO QUASH CASE AGAINST RAHUL

RANCHI, 23 FEB

Jharkhand High Court on Friday dismissed the petition filed by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to quash the proceedings against him in the trial court in a criminal defamation suit filed for his alleged derogatory remarks against BJP leader Amit Shah in 2018.

On 16 February, Gandhi's written version was presented in the court, after which the bench of Justice Ambujnath had reserved the decision.

The matter pertains to an election speech made by the former Congress president during the 2018 Congress session in Chaibasa.

BJP leader Naveen Jha, who has filed the defamation suit had alleged Rahul Gandhi had made objectionable remarks against the then BJP national president Amit Shah.

Gandhi was granted bail on 20 February, by a special court in Sultanpur in a defamation case filed by BJP leader Vijay Mishra on 4 August 2018, against Gandhi for allegedly making objectionable comments against Shah on 8 May during Karnataka elections. *—PTI*

HC junks Moitra's 'leaking information' plea against ED

NEW DELHI 23 FEB

Mahua Moitra **PHOTO: PTI**

Delhi High Court on Friday dismissed Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Mahua Moitra's plea against the alleged leakage of "confidential" information from ED to the media with a probe against her under Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

Justice Subramonium Prasad said Moitra is a former elected Member of Parliament and people are entitled to know about any news regarding public figures, who are subject to a closer scrutiny.

Moitra had sought a direction to restrain Enforcement Directorate (ED) from "leaking any information, including any confidential, sensitive, unverified/unconfirmed information, to the print/electronic media about the ongoing investigation".

The judge emphasised that "gag orders" against the media can be passed only when it has the potential to prejudice any investigation or ongoing trial.

She had also sought a direction to restrain several media organisations from "leaking, publishing/broadcasting of any information related to the ongoing investigation/proceedings about the investigation being carried out by Respondent No.1 (ED) ... under which a FEMA summons has been issued to the petitioner". A detailed copy of the court's decision is awaited.

The senior counsel appearing in the court on behalf of the former MP earlier claimed that Moitra was being "hounded" and information on the issuance of the summons to her by the federal agency was published by the media even before she received it. ED had issued the summons to Moitra in a case lodged under FEMA.

Advocate Sidhant Kumar, appearing in the court on behalf of a news organisation, said the material that has been reported is based on "sourced information" and people are entitled to know about the investigation against a public personality.

In her petition, Moitra had said the "leakages" to the media of confidential information regarding the investigation were causing a grave and prejudicial impact on her right to a free and fair investigation.

—PTI

WAS SENA'S 1ST CM

Manohar Joshi: The suave face of Shiv Sena

MUMBAI, 23 FEB

A suave face of the Shiv Sena at a time when the party was known for its rustic and street politics, former Maharashtra chief minister Manohar Joshi who went on to become the Lok Sabha speaker never severed ties with the Thackerays despite snubs.

From stepping down as chief minister following the "aadesh" (orders) of "saheb" Bal Thackeray to being booed and heckled by Shiv Sainiks at the party's first Dussherra rally after the founder's demise in 2012, Joshi never openly criticised the party leadership.

Joshi, 86 passed away on Friday at PD Hinduja Hospital, where he was admitted after suffering a cardiac arrest. He had also been admitted to the hospital in May last year after suffering a brain hemorrhage.

Born on 2 December 1937, in Konkan region of Maharashtra, Joshi obtained his Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from the prestigious Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI) in Mumbai.

His political career began with his involvement in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, but he joined Shiv Sena after being enamored by the appeal of party founder Bal Thackeray's "Sons of the Soil" campaign. Joshi began his career as a teacher and entered politics in 1967.

He was a municipal councilor in Mumbai during 1968-70 and Chairman of, Standing Committee of Mumbai Municipal Corporation in 1970. He was Mayor of Mumbai during 1976-1977.

He was then elected to Maharashtra Legislative Council in 1972. After serving three terms in Legislative Council, Joshi was elected to Maharashtra Legislative Assembly in 1990 and was Leader of the Opposition in the assembly during 1990-91.

In the 1999 general elections, Joshi won from the Mumbai North-Central Lok Sabha Constituency as a Shiv Sena candidate and was later Union Minister of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises.

Condoling Joshi's demise, Union minister Nitin Gadkari, who was a member of the Maharashtra ministry when the former was Chief Minister, said the state had lost a "cultured face" of politics.

Joshi's family said his last rites will be performed at Shivaji Park crematorium in Dadar area. *—PTI*

Joshi's political career began with his involvement in the RSS but later he joined Shiv Sena **PHOTO: ANI**

PHOTO: PTI

2 students die by suicide amid exam pressure in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, 23 FEB

Two students died allegedly by suicide due to examination pressure in separate incidents in Odisha's Ganjam and Bhadrak districts, police said on Friday.The suicide incidents came to the fore when the students were appearing in the annual Plus-II and class 10 examinations.While the body of a Plus II science second-year male student was found hanging in his house at Suryanagar in the Baidyanathpur area of Berhampur. On Friday morning, a Class 10 boy was found hanging at Jahangir Sasan village in Bhadrak district.The Plus-II boy, a student of Nilakantheswar Sishu Mandir in Berhampur, was reportedly caught while resorting to malpractice during the physics examination at Khallikote College on Thursday.In another incident involving the Class 10 student, was supposed to write English paper in the ongoing matriculation examination on Friday. However, his body was found hanging hours before the exam family members said.—*PTI*

Terrorist on the run for 10 years held in Rajasthan

JAIPUR, 23 FEB

A team of Rajasthan's Anti-Gangster Task Force on Friday arrested a terrorist who has been absconding for ten years, an official said.Additional Director General (Crime) Dinesh MN said that the force team took a major action and arrested terrorist Mohammad Merajuddin,31, a resident of Gangapur City, who was involved in terrorist activities and had a reward of Rs 25,000 on his head.The Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) team has been searching for him for 10 years.In 2014, the sleeper cell had a plan to carry out terrorist activities at various places in India. In this case, a total of 13 terrorists were arrested from Sikar, Jodhpur, and Jaipur districts of the state. —*PTI*

Man enters air force station posing as IAF commander, held

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

A 39-year-old man was arrested for allegedly entering the Palam Air Force Station in the Delhi Cantonment area posing as a wing commander of the IAF, police said on Friday.A senior police officer said that the accused, identified as Vinayak Chadha, wanted to get his father treated at the dental hospital of the air force station.The accused was held by the air force staff while he was trying to enter the restricted area, the DCP said.He said the man entered the air force dental hospital on Thimmaya Road by posing as a wing commander. He breached the first layer of security using a forged identity document but was caught later by air force security staff, Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Rohit Meena said.—*PTI*

3 Hizbul terrorists, 3 others chargesheeted for terror funding

JAMMU, 23 FEB

The State Investigation Agency has filed a fourth supplementary charge sheet against six accused, including three Pakistan-based Hizbul Mujahideen terrorists, in a case relating to terror funding, an official said on Friday.The cross-border terror syndicate was busted by the SIA in April 2022 following its investigation into a Hawala case involving former minister and chairman of Nature-Mankind Friendly Party Jatinder Singh who was subsequently arrested and chargesheeted along with 11 others.—*PTI*

Probe agencies misused to extort donations for BJP: Cong

Congress demanded a SC monitored probe into the matter

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

The Congress on Friday alleged that probe agencies were being misused to "extort" donations for the BJP from private companies and demanded a Supreme Court-monitored probe into what it called "hafta-vasooli" by the government.

Addressing a press conference, Congress General Secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh alleged that at least 30 companies, which donated a total of nearly Rs 335 crore to the BJP between financial years 2018-19 and 2022-23, faced investigation by central agencies during that period.

Ramesh said Congress General Secretary in-charge organisation K C Venugopal on Friday wrote to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman over the issue and asked why the government should not be open to a Supreme Court-monitored probe into the donations received by the BJP.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in a post on X said,

Congress General Secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh alleged that at least 30 companies, which donated a total of nearly Rs 335 crore to the BJP were probed PHOTO: PTI

"Do you know about the Prime Minister's 'Donate, take bail and business' scheme? In the country, the Prime Minister is doing business like 'vasooli bhai' by misusing ED, IT and CBI."

He said reports have revealed that 30 companies that faced investigation by various agencies, which have become "recovery agents" now, donated Rs 335 crore to the BJP during the investigation.

"The donation business is going on so shamelessly that the owners of a distillery in MP donated to the BJP as soon as they got the bail. Benefitting the company of a friend by dishonesty and adopting different rules for others? 'Illegal donations' and 'Electoral Bonds' given to BJP under Modi rule are the guarantee of 'Ease of Doing Business'," Gandhi said in his post in Hindi, using the hashtag"#HaftaVasooliSarkar".

Ramesh asked if the government would come up with a "white paper" on the BJP's finances, not just the sources but how corporate firms were "coerced" to donate by misusing investigative agencies against them.

"If you have nothing to hide, then are you willing to present a point-by-point rebuttal on the 'chronology' of events which led to the filling of BJP's treasury?" he asked.

In his letter to Sitharaman, Venugopal said media reports have exposed the alleged "quid pro quo between BJP and several firms, which in a strange coincidence donated to it after the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Income Tax Department (IT) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and others raided or searched those enterprises".

Of the 30 firms, 23 companies, which gave a total of Rs 187.58 crore to the BJP during this period, had never donated any amount to the BJP between 2014 and the year of the raid, Venugopal said."At least four of these companies donated a total of Rs 9.05 crore within four months of the central agency visit," the Congress leader said in his letter.

At least six of these firms, which were already donors to the BJP, handed out a heftier amount in the months following the searches, he alleged.

"The above instances seem to be a clear-cut case of legal extortion in the form of donations to the ruling party, by exerting pressure on investigative agencies," the letter said.

—*PTI*

Patients treated on street, HC seeks M'rashtra's reply

MUMBAI, 23 FEB

Bombay High Court on Friday took note of food poisoning patients being treated on a street outside a hospital in Maharashtra's Buldhana district and sought an affidavit from the government.

Government pleader PP Kakade submitted to the bench of Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya and Justice Arif Doctor that the hospital had a capacity of only 30 beds and around 150 persons had come complaining of uneasiness and stomach issues.

"All the persons had food poisoning after consuming sweets from a local temple. The hospital capacity was only 30 but it had enough staff and medicines," Kakade said.

He added that the patients were immediately treated and were discharged the next day.

"Their condition was not serious. We could not treat them inside the hospital and hence treated them outside," Kakade told the court.

The bench then questioned what if anyone's condition had suddenly turned serious.

Kakade said the district hospital was 100kms away and if any patient's condition had worsened, then he or she would have been transferred there.

The incident took place on Tuesday night during the 'Harinam Saptah', a week-long religious event, at Somthana village in Lonar taluka, Buldhana.

—*PTI*

DUPED INTO FIGHTING

India in touch with Russia to get back men fighting in war

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

India on Friday said it was in touch with Moscow for early "discharge" of Indians working as support staff to Russian Army and urged its nationals to stay away from the conflict zone in Ukraine.

The comments by External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal came following a report that some Indians are working as support staff to the Russian army in the conflict zone.

"We are aware that a few Indian nationals have signed up for support jobs with the Russian army," Jaiswal said.

He said the Indian embassy in Moscow has regularly taken up this matter with the relevant Russian authorities for their "early discharge".

Indians have been working as security helpers in the Russian military, and are forced to fight with soldiers PHOTO: PIXABAY

"We urge all Indian nationals to exercise due caution and stay away from this conflict," he said.

According to media reports, several Indians have been working as security helpers in the Russian military, and they were forced to fight with Russian soldiers in certain areas along Russia's border with Ukraine.All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) leader Asaduddin Owaisi had urged the external affairs ministry to rescue the Indians. —*PTI*

Court cannot direct states to implement particular schemes: SC

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

The scope of judicial review in examining policy matters of the government is very limited and the courts cannot direct the States to implement a particular policy or scheme because a "better, fairer or wiser" option is available, Supreme Court has said.

The observation came while disposing of a PIL seeking the formulation of a scheme for setting up community kitchens to combat hunger and malnutrition.

The top court refused to pass any direction in the matter observing that National Food Security Act (NFSA) and other welfare schemes are being implemented by the center and states.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said the legality of the policy, and not the wisdom or soundness of the policy, would be the subject of judicial review.

The top court's judgement came on a PIL filed by social activists Anun Dhawan, Ishann Singh, and Kunajan Singh seeking directions to all states and union territories to formulate a scheme for community kitchens to combat hunger and malnutrition. The plea had alleged that many children under the age of five die every day due to hunger. —*PTI*

BJP LEADER, 10 OTHERS NABBED FOR SEX RACKET

HOWRAH, 23 FEB

A BJP leader was arrested along with 10 others on the charge of running a sex racket in a hotel in Howrah district, a senior police officer said Friday.

Sabyasachi Ghosh, a local BJP leader, and his 10 associates were arrested after the police raided a hotel in Sankrail area on Thursday evening.

The ruling Trinamool Congress, which has been facing opposition flak over alleged sexual abuse by some of its leaders in Sandeshkhali, slammed the saffron camp over the arrest of its leader for his alleged involvement in the flesh trade.

The Bengal BJP is yet to react to the incident. —*PTI*

Bank fraud: ED raids SP leader, his company

LUCKNOW, 23 FEB

Enforcement Directorate on Friday raided locations in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Haryana as part of an alleged Rs 750 crore bank loan fraud-linked money laundering probe against a road construction and toll plazas operating company promoted by SP leader Vinay Shankar Tiwari.

The search action is being carried out against Gangotri Enterprises and its main promoters under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

These accused are alleged to have indulged in an alleged bank loan fraud of about Rs 750 crore between 2012 and 2016 against a consortium of banks led by the Bank of India (BoI).

The agency had attached assets worth about Rs 72 crore of the company in this case in November 2023.

The money laundering case stems from a Central Bureau of Investigation(CBI) FIR Gangotri Enterprises Ltd., the ED had alleged in a statement, "in collusion" with its promoters, directors, and guarantors "fraudulently" availed credit facilities to the tune of Rs 1,129.44 crore from a consortium of seven banks led by BoI. —*PTI*

A BREAKTHROUGH

Aditya-L1 detects solar wind impact of CME

BENGALURU, 23 FEB

Advanced sensors of a payload on board India's maiden solar mission Aditya-L1 have successfully detected the impact of coronal mass ejections (CMEs), according to ISRO.

The payload -- Plasma Analyser Package for Aditya (PAPA) -- is an energy and mass analyser designed for in-situ measurements of solar wind electrons and ions in the low energy range, the space agency noted.

It has two sensors: the Solar Wind Electron Energy Probe (SWEEP, measuring electrons in the energy range of 10 eV to 3 keV) and the Solar Wind Ion Composition Analyser (SWICAR, measuring ions in the energy range of 10 eV to 25 keV and mass range of 1-60 amu).

The payload for Aditya is an energy and mass analyser designed for in-situ measurements of solar wind electrons PHOTO: PTI

The sensors are also equipped to measure the direction of arrival of solar wind particles.

The data collected by PAPA, developed by the Space Physics Laboratory and Avionics Entity of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, revealed the occurrence of CME events, notably on 15 December, 2023, and during 10-11 February, 2024.

"The CME on 15 December, 2023, was a single event. PAPA observations during this period showed an abrupt increase in total electron and ion counts and the time variations align with the solar wind parameters and magnetic field measurements obtained from the Deep Space Climate Observatory and Advanced Composition Explorer satellites at the L1 point,", an ISRO statement said.

The SWEEP and SWICAR sensors on PAPA-Aditya-L1, ISRO said, are currently making continuous observations of solar wind electrons and ions in the default mode, demonstrating that they are performing as per the design in all modes of operations.

The observations made by PAPA emphasise its effectiveness in monitoring space weather conditions and its capability to detect and analyse solar phenomena, it said.

The launch of Aditya-L1 by PSLV-C57 rocket was successfully accomplished by ISRO on September 2.

Aditya-L1 spacecraft carried seven payloads to study the Sun -- four to observe the light from the Sun and the remaining three to measure insitu parameters of the plasma and magnetic fields.

Aditya-L1 was placed in a halo orbit around the Lagrangian Point 1 (L1), which is 1.5 million km from the Earth in the direction of the Sun. It revolves around the Sun with the same relative position and hence can see the Sun continuously, ISRO officials said. —*PTI*

NEW SURROGACY RULES

Couples can use an egg or sperm of a donorin case one of the partners is suffering from a medical condition PHOTO:PIXABAY

Govt allows donor egg and sperm in surrogacy

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Centre has amended the surrogacy rules 2022 allowing married couples to use an egg or sperm of a donor in case one of the partners is suffering from a medical condition.

District Medical Board has to certify that either the husband or wife is suffering from a medical condition necessitating the use of donor gamete.

"In case when District Medical Board certifies that either husband or wife constituting the intending couple suffers from a medical condition necessitating use of donor gamete, then surrogacy using donor gamete is allowed," the notification said.

The surrogacy using donor gamete is allowed subject to the condition that the child to be born through surrogacy must have at least one gamete from the intending couple, it stated.This means if both the partners have medical problems or are unable to have their gametes they cannot opt for surrogacy.

"Single women (widow or divorcee) undergoing surrogacy must use self-eggs and donor sperm to avail surrogacy procedures," the notification read.The amendment came after Supreme Court last year received petitions from women across the country after it allowed a woman with a rare congenital disorder to avail of surrogacy with a donor egg. —*PTI*

SC questioned purpose of previous rules

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Union Health Ministry amended the earlier rules that stated that couples undergoing surrogacy must have both gametes from the intending couple.“The very purpose of surrogacy would get defeated by such rules,” an apex court bench had observed in December last year while permitting more than two dozen petitioners to use the donor eggs to become mothers through surrogacy.In January, Supreme Court had asked the centre why it was not deciding for many women rushing to the top court with grievances

—PTI

Netizens allege bias in Google AI's response on PM

New Delhi, 23 Feb

Google's AI tool Gemini's response to a question around Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in direct violation of IT rules as well as several provisions of the criminal code, minister of state for electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar said on Friday.The minister took cognizance of the issue raised by verified accounts of a journalist alleging bias in Google Gemini in response to a question on Modi while it gave no clear answer when a similar question was tossed for Trump and Zelenskyy."These are direct violations of Rule 3(1)(b) of Intermediary Rules (IT rules) of the IT act and violations of several provisions of the Criminal code," Chandrasekhar said on social media platform X.

The minister marked the post to Google and the Ministry of Electronics and IT indicating further action in the matter.

The journalist has shared a screenshot in which a question was asked to Google Gemini about Modi.In response, Gemini made uncharitable comments about Prime Minister Modi but was circumspect when the same query was posed about Trump and Zelenskyy. —*PTI*

'No Shab-e-barat prayers at razed Delhi mosque'

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

The Delhi High Court on Friday refused to permit prayers at the recently demolished 'Akhoondji mosque' and the nearby graveyard in Mehrauli on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat.

Justice Purushaindra Kumar Kaurav, while dealing with an application by the Managing Committee of the Delhi Waqf Board, noted that the court has directed status quo on the site which is now in the possession of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA).

The application forms part of a petition by the committee on the issue of demolition.

Justice Kaurav observed that the main petition, which was heard by the court on several occasions, is already listed for final disposal on 7 March.

"At this stage, the court is not inclined to pass any directions. The application is dismissed," ordered the court.The 'Akhoondji mosque', believed to be over 600 years old, as well as the Behrul Uloom madrasa there were declared as illegal structures in Sanjay Van and demolished by the DDA on 30 January.The counsel for the petitioner said worshippers, whose families are buried in the nearby graveyard, should be allowed offer prayers there on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat later this month.He said the mosque was several centuries old and prayers were being offered there for the last many years. On 5 February, the high court had asked the DDA to maintain status quo on the site where the mosque once stood. —*PTI*

FARMERS' PROTEST

Borrowers, mostly farmers from Nepal,Äôs rural districts, protesting against the alleged excesses of private lenders gather for a protest in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Friday. Hundreds of protestors from remote villages had walked for weeks to arrive in the capital to demand that the government enact laws to regulate the lenders.
PHOTO: PTI

Sacrifice and Patience: Medics response to war

TWO YEARS OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Russian-Ukraine conflict has killed more than 10,000 civilians and wounded nearly 20,000 others, according to the United Nations
PHOTO: PTI

Maj Oleh Kravchenko has the sort of chuckle that's hard to resist - deep and treacly and mischievous.

"I'm still alive," he said, tilting his head to one side in his wheelchair, like a spectator marvelling at someone else's magic trick.

As Ukraine marks the second anniversary of the war, Kravchenko's turbulent story captures something of the journey so many people here - soldiers and civilians alike - have been on, as they've come to understand the sort of sacrifices and patience this long conflict is demanding of them.

Kravchenko, in charge of the 57th Brigade's medical teams, took us to an evacuation point in the bombed-out ruins of an old factory, and then helped us sneak, without permission, past far more cautious officials, and into the main military hospital, where dozens of shell-shocked Ukrainian soldiers lay silently in their beds.

"A practical guy - unorthodox," one of his colleagues remarked about Kravchenko's style, with an indulgent smile.

Kravchenko had already seen plenty of war before the Russian invasion. After leaving his job administering a hospital in central Ukraine, he'd worked as a doctor for the United Nations, spending several years in Afghanistan, and visiting Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan too.

But nothing had prepared him for the opening months of this conflict.

"Everywhere, blood, blood, blood," he said, as we stood beside a stack of blood-stained stretchers.

"Ukrainian soldiers are strong because it's our land. It's my country. My daughter, my son, are here. My heart is here," he said, his back straightening.

"I hope one, maybe one and a half months and we will shoot every Russian. Our soldiers will hold their positions. We will give the enemy a good fight."

Maj Kravchenko and his men left Lysychansk only a few weeks before it was captured by Russian forcesIt would be a whole year before we ran into Kravchenko again, this time on the outskirts of Bakhmut, another frontline town, 50km (31 miles) to the southwest.

"Still alive," he said, by way of a greeting. It was something I'd begun hearing other soldiers say.But his grin seemed forced.

It was the day before Yevgeny Prigozhin, the leader of Russia's Wagner group, launched his short-lived mutiny against President Vladimir Putin in July 2023.

Bakhmut itself had already fallen to the Russians weeks earlier, but Ukraine's much-heralded counter-offensive was in its early stage and there were strong hopes for its success.

"So much heavy artillery," Kravchenko remarked.

As we sat outside, hiding beneath some trees to avoid Russian drones circling overhead, two incoming shells sent us diving for cover. The second failed to explode and Kravchenko dismissed it, with a short laugh, as a mere "fart."

But there was no disguising his unease.

'The fear never goes'

The team has recently moved to a new base close to the town of Kupyansk, now being targeted heavily by Russian forces.

Last summer's counter-offensive had achieved little and Ukrainian forces have recently been driven out of Avdiivka. US arms supplies are running out and President Zelensky has warned that without more western help Russia will win.

"There are drones everywhere. And glide bombs. It has become so dangerous, but we're holding the line. We've grown accustomed to this work now. The fear never goes, but somehow you get used to it," said Babarykin. Three new casualties, all suffering from shell-shock, lay quietly on beds nearby.

"I would like to go back to my job on the frontline. But I cannot. I did my job well. After being wounded I want to start a new project for my country. A military hospital of my dreams. I know how to do it," he said, fidgeting, in apparent frustration, with the handles of his wheelchair.Like so many Ukrainians right now, Kravchenko worries that the West may be losing interest in supporting the fight against Russia. "It will be a long war. Ukraine is the frontline of Europe. If we lose, after that it will be Poland and Germany and other countries," he said sombrely.Kravchenko's military call-sign is "Afghan", in reference to his work abroad. But he's hoping that will change soon, if and when his knee heals.

"In one month, I will run like the wind. After that you will call me 'Wind'," he said, with something close to a chuckle.

—BBC News

SALAR ساڈھ

Heart changes in size and shape with exercise

Exercise has long been recognized by clinicians, scientists and public health officials as an important way to maintain health throughout a person's lifespan. It improves overall fitness, helps build strong muscles and bones, reduces the risk of chronic disease. But large amounts of exercise may also harm the heart, leading to the development of a condition called athletic heart.

The American Heart Association generally recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise, such as brisk walking, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise, such as running, each week. When people exceed these guidelines, the heart may remodel itself in response – that is, it begins to change its size and shape. As a result, heart function may also change. These changes in heart structure and function among people who engage in high levels of exercise are referred to as the athletic heart, or athlete's heart. Exercise is generally divided into two broad categories: dynamic and static.

Dynamic exercises, like running, cross-country skiing and soccer, require the heart to pump an increased amount of blood, compared to the amount delivered to the body at rest, in order to sustain the activity. For example, when running, the amount of blood the heart pumps to the body may increase by threefold to fivefold compared to at rest.

Static exercises, like weightlifting, gymnastics or rock climbing, require the body to use skeletal muscle in order to push or pull heavy amounts of weight. While the heart does pump more blood to skeletal muscles that are working during these activities, these kinds of exercises depend on a muscle's ability to move the weight. Some exercises, like rowing or cycling, are both highly dynamic and highly static because they require the heart to pump large amounts of blood while simultaneously requiring a large amount of muscle strength to sustain effort.

It is important to distinguish between dynamic and static exercise because the heart adapts differently according to the type of exercise you engage in over time. Dynamic exercise increases the volume of blood pumping through the heart and can cause the heart to become enlarged, or dilated, over time. Static exercise increases the amount of pressure on the heart and can also cause it to become enlarged over time but with thickened walls.Exercise that exceeds guidelines, such as exercising more than an hour most days of the week, may lead to development of athletic heart. Athletic heart commonly occurs among endurance athletes, who regularly compete in activities like marathons or other long-duration events. Many exercise several hours per day and more than 12 to 15 hours per week.Among runners, for example, the heart remodels itself in response to having to pump a high volume of blood. As a result, the chambers of the heart enlarge to hold and pump more blood. Among weightlifters, the heart remodels itself by thickening in response to the increase in pressure applied on the heart.

First, athletes with markedly enlarged hearts may be at risk of developing atrial fibrillation, which is abnormal heart rhythms that typically occur among older adults or people with high blood pressure or heart failure. Abnormal heart rhythms are worrisome because they may lead to a stroke.There are many potential reasons atrial fibrillation occurs in athletes. A dilated atrium – the top chamber in the heart – may become inflamed and develop scar tissue, increasing the risk of atrial fibrillation. Stress and environmental factors may also work together to increase the risk of arrhythmia.

Coronary artery calcification, or CAC, is another concern among elite athletes. Coronary artery calcification, which commonly occurs in older adults or those with risk factors for coronary artery disease, increases the risk of having a heart attack or stroke. In recent years, doctors have been using imaging tests to monitor calcium buildup in the arteries of their patients to try to determine their risk of heart attack or stroke over time.

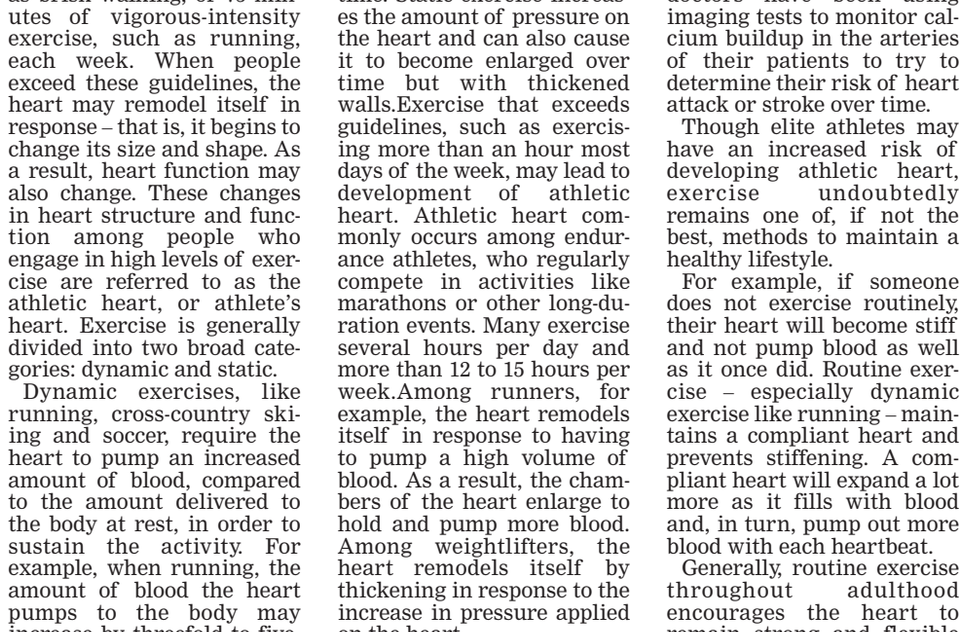
Though elite athletes may have an increased risk of developing athletic heart, exercise undoubtedly remains one of, if not the best, methods to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

For example, if someone does not exercise routinely, their heart will become stiff and not pump blood as well as it once did. Routine exercise – especially dynamic exercise like running – maintains a compliant heart and prevents stiffening. A compliant heart will expand a lot more as it fills with blood and, in turn, pump out more blood with each heartbeat.

Generally, routine exercise throughout adulthood encourages the heart to remain strong and flexible even in old age. Even if someone were only to begin regularly exercising in their 40s to 50s, it is possible to reverse some of the effects of sedentary aging.

It is never too late to start exercising. Routinely following exercise guidelines can help promote physical and mental health and help your heart stay young throughout your life.

Courtesy, The Conversation



Large amounts of exercise may also harm the heart, leading to the development of a condition called athletic heart
PHOTO: PIXABAY

LETTERS Write to us at salar@salar.news

Remembering the horrors of Bengal famine through narratives

Bengal famine of 1943 killed more than three million people and it was one of the worst losses of civilian life on the Allied side in World War Two
PHOTO: WORLDATLAS

The Bengal famine of 1943 killed more than three million people in eastern India. It was one of the worst losses of civilian life on the Allied side in World War Two.

There is no memorial, museum, or even a plaque, anywhere in the world to the people who died. However, a few survivors remain, and one man is determined to gather their stories before it is too late.

'Hunger stalked us'

"Many people sold their boys and girls for a little rice. Many wives and young women ran off, hand-in-hand with men they knew or didn't know."

Bijoykrishna Tripathi is describing the desperate measures people took to find food during the Bengal famine.He is not sure of his exact age, but his voter card says he is 112. Bijoykrishna is one of the last people to remember the disaster.

He talks faintly and slowly about growing up in Midnapore, a district in Bengal. Rice was the staple food, and he remembers its price rising "by leaps and bounds" in the summer of 1942.

"Hunger stalked us. Hunger and epidemics. People of all ages began to die."He remembers some food relief, but says it was inadequate.

Listening to him on his veranda are four generations of his family. Also with them is Sailen Sarkar who, for the past few years, has been travelling around the Bengali countryside, gathering first-hand accounts from survivors of the devastating famine.

Sailen says he first became "obsessed" by the Bengal famine because of a family photograph album. The pictures had been taken by his father, who had been involved with a local Indian charity, giving out relief during the famine. Sailen says his father was a poor man. "In my childhood I saw the terror of starvation in his eyes," he says.However, it was not until 2013 when Sailen - now a retired teacher - started his quest. While walking in Midnapore, he fell into conversation about the famine with an 86-year-old man.

A forgotten fate

In 1942, rice supplies in Bengal were under intense pressure.

Burma - which bordered Bengal - was invaded by Japan early in the year, and rice imports from that country stopped abruptly.

Bengal now found itself near the front line and Calcutta became host to hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers and workers in wartime industries, increasing the demand for rice. Wartime inflation was rife, putting the price of rice out of reach for millions who were already struggling.

Meanwhile, British fears that the Japanese would attempt to invade east India prompted a "denial" policy - this involved confiscating surplus rice and boats from towns and villages in the Bengal Delta. The aim was to deny food supplies and transport to any advancing force, but it disrupted the already fragile local economy, and caused prices to rise further. Rice was hoarded for food security, but often for profit.To cap it all, the devastating cyclone of October 1942 destroyed many rice crops, with crop disease ruining much of the rest.Relief efforts started to be put into place by the end of 1943 with the arrival of a new viceroy, Field Marshall Lord Wavell. But many had already died by then.

'A living archive'

Discussions over the causes and who was to blame have often overshadowed the stories of the survivors.

Sailen has now gathered more than 60 eyewitness accounts. In most cases, the people he says he talked to were uneducated, and had rarely spoken about the famine or been asked, even by their own family.

There is no archive dedicated to collecting survivor testimonies. Sailen believes their stories were overlooked because they were the poorest and most vulnerable in society.

"It is as if they were all waiting. If only someone would listen to their words," he says.

Niratan Bedwa was 100 when Sailen met her. She described the agony of mothers trying to look after their children.

"Mothers didn't have any breast milk. Their bodies had become all bones, no flesh," she said. "Many children died at birth, their mothers too. Even those that were born healthy died young from hunger. Lots of women killed themselves at that time."

Sailen also talked to people who had profited from the famine. One man admitted that he bought up a lot of land "in exchange for rice and dal or a little money". He also told Sailen that another household died without an heir, so he took the land as his own.

Kushanava Choudhury, a Bengali-American writer, accompanied Sailen on one of his visits to meet some of the survivors.

"We didn't have to search for them - they weren't hiding, they were all in plain sight, in villages all across West Bengal and Bangladesh, who were just sitting there as the largest archive in the world," he says.

"Nobody had bothered to talk to them. I felt tremendous shame about that."

Prof Shruti Kapila of Cambridge University says the fate of the famine victims has perhaps been overshadowed because the 1940s were, for India, a "decade of death".

A year later, the British left, dividing the country into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. There was joy at independence, but the partition was bloody and traumatic - more than a million people died as people turned on those of the other religion. Up to 12 million people crossed the new border.Bengal itself was divided between India and East Pakistan, which would later become Bangladesh.

Prof Kapila says of this period, "There's very little punctuation to a series of mass death events that take place. And that's why I would think that the Bengal famine in a way struggles to find its own place in that narrative."

Eighty years on, there are only a handful of survivors. Sailen remembers going to talk to one man, Anangamohan Das, who was then 91. On hearing why he was there, the man was quiet for some time. Tears then streamed down his sunken cheeks as he said, "Why did you come so late?" But the dozens of accounts Sailen has collected are a small testament to an event that left millions dead, and millions more lives changed.

"When you want to forget your history," he says, "you want to forget everything." Sailen is determined this should not happen.

—BBC News

PHOTO: PTI

Trump's lawyers call for dismissal of classified docus case

WASHINGTON, 23 FEB

Former President Donald Trump's legal team filed multiple motions on Thursday urging a Florida judge to dismiss the criminal case charging him with illegally retaining classified documents, claiming in part that presidential immunity protects him from prosecution an argument they have already submitted to the US Supreme Court in his election interference case. Lawyers Christopher Kise and Todd Blanche wrote that the charges "turn on his alleged decision to designate records as personal under the Presidential Records Act (PRA) and to cause the records to be moved from the White House to Mar-a-Lago." Since Trump made this decision while he was still in office, they wrote, it "was an official act, and as such is subject to presidential immunity." Trump faces dozens of felony counts in federal court in Florida. *—AP*

Cop charged with murder of missing Sydney couple

SYDNEY, 23 FEB

A 28-year-old police officer has been charged with murdering missing Australian TV personality Jesse Baird and his boyfriend Luke Davies. Detectives launched a frantic search on Wednesday after the couple's bloodied items were found in a bin near Sydney. Beaumont Lamarre-Condon, Baird's ex-boyfriend, was being sought by police and handed himself in on Friday. Detectives say they are yet to locate the men's bodies or confirm their cause of death. Police allege the couple were killed on Monday inside Jesse Baird's house in Paddington, an inner Sydney suburb, before their bodies were moved in a white van. Witnesses told investigators they heard "shouting" and a "verbal argument" that morning, and the rented van was captured at the scene on CCTV footage that evening.*—BBC News*

Fossil reveals 240 million year-old 'dragon'

EDINBURGH, 23 FEB

Scientists have revealed a new, remarkably complete fossil - a 16ft-long aquatic reptile from the Triassic period. The creature dates back 240 million years and has been dubbed a "dragon" because of its extremely long neck. It is called Dinocephalosaurus orientalis, a species that was originally identified back in 2003. This spectacular new fossil has allowed scientists to see the full anatomy of this bizarre prehistoric beast. Nick Fraser, from National Museums Scotland, said this was the first time scientists had been able to see it.*—BBC News*

Pak scribe, vocal critic of govt, held in corruption case

LAHORE, 23 FEB

A Pakistani journalist, who has been a vocal critic of the powerful army's role in politics, was arrested here on Friday in an alleged corruption case, months after he was released for being part of the unprecedented attacks on military facilities last year. Popular TV anchor and YouTuber Imran Riaz Khan, remanded to a 14-day judicial custody, claimed he was arrested in a false case. He is a supporter of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan. Khan and his father have been accused of "securing a contract pertaining to Dharabi Lake in Chakwal at an inflated price," according to the Anti-Corruption Establishment (ACE), Punjab. Earlier in the morning, a heavy contingent of policemen raided Khan's house here and arrested him in connection with the case registered by the ACE, Punjab.*—AP*

Israel to control security, civilian affairs in Gaza post war

JERUSALEM, 23 FEB

Israel will control security in a demilitarised Gaza Strip and play a role in civilian affairs after its war on Hamas ends, according to a plan Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu submitted to his Cabinet for approval.

Israel said The UN relief agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, will be shut.

While lacking specifics, the plan marks the first time he has presented a formal postwar vision. Netanyahu's insistence on an open-ended Israeli role in running Gaza runs counter to key US proposals for a revitalised Palestinian autonomous government eventually governing both Gaza and the Israeli-occupied West Bank as a precursor to statehood.

The plan, published by the prime minister's office, was presented to Cabinet ministers late on Thursday. It reiterates that Israel is determined to crush Hamas, the militant group that overran the Gaza Strip in 2007.

Polls have indicated that a majority of Palestinians don't support Hamas, but that the group has deep roots in Palestinian society. Critics say Israel's goal of eliminating Hamas is unattainable.

It calls for freedom of action for Israel's military across Gaza after the war to thwart any security threat and says Israel would establish a buffer zone inside Gaza likely to provoke US objections.

The plan also envisions Gaza being governed by local officials who it says would "not be identified with countries or entities that support terrorism and will not receive payment from them."

It's not clear if any Palestinians would agree to fill such sub-contractor roles. Over the past decades, Israel has repeatedly tried and failed to set up hand-picked local Palestinian governing bodies. Israel said it will promote a "de-radicalisation plan ... in all religious, educational and welfare institutions in Gaza" with the involvement of "Arab countries that have experience in promoting de-radicalisation". The plan envisions Gaza's "complete demilitarisation beyond what is required for the needs of maintaining public order". Israel will only allow the reconstruction of Gaza to begin after the completion of the Gaza's de-militarisation and the commencement of a "de-radicalisation process". The Israeli army will maintain indefinitely the freedom to intervene in Gaza to prevent the resurgence of "terror activity". Israel will continue to establish a security buffer zone on the Palestinian side of the Strip's border that will remain in place "as long as there is a security need for it". Israel will enforce a "southern closure" on the border between Egypt and Gaza with assistance from the US and in cooperation with Egypt.

Israel will maintain security control "over the entire area west of Jordan" from the land, air and sea to "thwart threats" from the occupied West Bank.

Palestinians look at the destruction after an Israeli strike on buildings and a mosque in Rafah, Gaza Strip on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

2 YEARS OF INVASION

Ukrainians in agony as search for missing people continues

30,000 missing since Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February, 2022

KYIV, 23 FEB

Iryna Reva stares at her phone, replaying the last video her 25-year-old son Vladyslav sent her from the front line before the volunteer soldier disappeared 19 months ago in a battle with Russian forces in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region.

Reva is one of the thousands of Ukrainians desperately seeking news of loved ones who have disappeared in the two years since Russia's full-scale invasion began. According to Ukraine's National Police, more than 30,000 people have been reported missing in the last 24 months.

The last time Reva spoke to her son, she begged him not to take part in a battle the next morning. "Don't go, say your arm hurts," she told him over the phone.

"Mom, I'm sorry. I love you very much," Vladyslav replied. "I'm going into battle. I don't know if I'll be back.

The missing include soldiers like Vladyslav lost on the battlefield, but also civilians and children who have vanished in a variety of circumstances. For many relatives, the agonising uncertainty and relentless search for answers has already gone on for two years with no end in sight.

A Ukrainian soldier takes his position on the frontline near Klishchiivka the Donetsk region, Ukraine, Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Inna Usenko left her hometown of Mariupol on a business trip the day before the war began in 2022. She lost contact with her brother, Herman Sikorskyi, on 1 March as Russia laid siege to the eastern city and thousands of civilians were trapped. Several weeks later, a Russian airstrike hit the house where he had lived.

"I don't know what to think, whether he's alive or not," she said.

In an attempt to find her brother, Usenko filed a missing person's report with the occupation authorities, the Russian Federation and the Russian Red Cross. From her home, which is now in Spain, she came to Ukraine to file a police report and provide DNA to Ukrainian authorities. Despite the efforts, neither side was able to provide her with any information.

The International Committee of the Red Cross says since February 2022 its team has been contacted more than 100,000 times by families searching for their loved ones.

For relatives looking for information, the official search often begins with submitting a DNA sample. Andrii Levytskyi, head of forensics at the National Police's main investigation department, said more than 18,000 DNA samples of relatives of servicemen and civilians have been collected and processed.

DNA is a vital part of establishing the status of the missing person, especially if they are military. He said they have had cases in which soldiers were found wounded in captivity, despite testimony from their comrades that they were killed in battle.

Over the past two years, numerous volunteer projects have arisen to aid in the search for missing people, often serving as a last resort for relatives who receive no official information from authorities.

Mariia Reshetova, who runs the Search for the Missing project under the Kateryna Osadcha Foundation, said they have around 1,000 open cases and have already closed hundreds. *—AP*

US TARGETS RUSSIA WITH MORE SANCTIONS

WASHINGTON, 23 FEB

The Treasury Department plans to impose more than 500 new sanctions on Russia and its war machine on Friday as the US vows to keep up its financial pressure on Moscow with the war entering its third gruelling year.

The sanctions represent the largest single tranche of penalties since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, 2022. They come on the heels of a series of new arrests and indictments announced by the Justice Department on Thursday that target Russian businessmen, including the head of Russia's second-largest bank, and their middlemen in five separate federal cases. The Biden administration is seeking to demonstrate its unwavering support for Ukraine, even though Republican lawmakers allied with former President Donald Trump are blocking vital additional lUS military aid. *—AP*

POST NORTH'S MISSLE TEST

US, South Korea warplanes kick off joint air drills

South Korean Air Force F-15K fighter jet takes off from a South Korean Air Force base in South Korea, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

SEOUL, 23 FEB

South Korea and the United States flew advanced stealth fighters in a joint missile-interception drill Friday over the Korean Peninsula, South Korea's air force said, an apparent response to a spate of weapons tests this year by rival North Korea.

North Korea has conducted six rounds of missiles tests so far this year, most of them reportedly involving cruise missiles that fly at a low altitude to overcome opponents' missile defenses. Analysts say that in the event of a conflict, North Korea aims to use cruise missiles to strike U.S. aircraft carriers as well as US military bases in Japan.

South Korea's air force said the drill on Friday involved fight-generation stealth F-35A fighter jets from both countries and other fighter jets from South Korea.

It said the US F-35As were deployed in South Korea on Wednesday from Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan.

North Korea has ramped up its weapons tests since 2022 in what experts call an attempt to increase its leverage in future diplomacy. South Korea and the US have responded by expanding their military exercises.

This year, North Korea is expected to step up its testing activities and belligerent rhetoric as both the US and South Korea head into elections. North Korea is likely seeking internation-

Children raped in Sudan amid conflict, says UN

GENEVA, 23 FEB

The UN human rights office said in a new report on Friday that scores of people, including children, have been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence in the ongoing conflict in Sudan, assaults that may amount to war crimes.

Sudan plunged into chaos in mid-April when clashes erupted in the capital, Khartoum, between rival Sudanese forces the country's military, led by Gen Abdel Fattah Burhan, and a paramilitary faction known as the Rapid Support Forces, under the command of Gen Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo.

The fighting quickly spread across the African country, especially urban areas but also the restive western Darfur region, and has so far killed at least 12,000 people and sent over 8 million fleeing their homes, the report said.

The report, which covers a period from the outbreak of the fighting up to 15 December, documents abuses in a country that has been largely inaccessible to aid groups and rights monitors recently, clouding the impact of a conflict that been overshadowed by wars in places like Gaza and Ukraine.

The report found that at

Imran wants IMF aid to Pak stalled over 'rigged' elections

WASHINGTON/ ISLAMABAD, 23 FEB

IMF is looking forward to working with the new government in Pakistan, a top official has said while keeping mum on jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's demand that the global lender should conduct an "audit" of the election results before approving any new loan for the cash-strapped country.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan on Thursday said he will write to the International Monetary Fund, demanding the Washington-based institution stop its support to Pakistan where his political rivals, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party, were on the verge of forming a coalition government with a "stolen mandate."

Imran Khan *PHOTO: PTI*

The 71-year-old former prime minister's message from jail was conveyed through Barrister Ali Zafar, who met him in the Adiala Jail Rawalpindi where he has been incarcerated since last year after being convicted in corruption and other cases. During the press conference in Washington on Thursday, Julie Kozack, the head of the Communications Department of the IMF said was asked about whether Pakistan was on track to secure the third tranche of the stand-by agreement reached in June 2023 and also if the IMF would entertain any letter by Khan calling for investigations into election irregularities. *—PTI*

4 die, 19 missing as fire engulfs 2 Spain buildings

VALENCIA, 23 FEB

A fire engulfed two residential buildings in the eastern Spanish city of Valencia on Thursday, killing four people and leaving 19 others missing hours after the blaze started, authorities said.

The fire sent fleeing residents onto balconies where some were rescued by firefighters, officials said. Firefighters rushed to the scene on the outskirts of the city centre as flames burst from windows of the 14-story residential building where the blaze apparently started. Residents could be seen waiting for rescue on balconies, and firefighters used a crane to lift two residents from one of the balconies.

Valencia's assistant emergency services director Jorge Suarez said some six hours after the blaze started firefighters were trying to cool down the outside of the building before attempting to go inside.

Soldiers from Spain's Military Emergency Unit also were deployed and medics set up a large tent to tend to the injured on the scene. The cause of the fire was not immediately known, but news reports said it might have spread rapidly owing to materials used in the building's structure.

The fire sent clouds of black smoke billowing skyward that could be seen from afar. *—AP*

Indian running for US Cong inspired by Sikhs

WASHINGTON, 23 FEB

Krystle Kaul, a noted Indian-American defence and national security expert, says her running for the US Congress is inspired by the Sikh tradition of oneness and a strong sense of giving back to the community.

"I am half Kashmiri Pandit and half Punjabi Sikh. I am proud of both of my cultural backgrounds. Growing up in America, being bicultural is something unique and something that I have embraced. My grandparents and my parents have embedded that in me. I am proud to stand today as the first ever Kashmiri Pandit to stand for Congress and also as the only Sikh woman to currently run for Congress in the country," Krystle told PTI in a recent interview.

Kaul, who speaks nine languages English, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Dari and Kashmiri -- is running from the 10th Congressional District of Virginia. The incumbent Jennifer Wexton, a Democrat, is not seeking re-election, therefore making it an open seat.

"My Nani Vimal Chaddha Malik used to take me to Glen Cove Gurdwara in Long Island, New York. There I would serve langar. I learned a lot about Sikh traditions and the notion of oneness. I'm proud of that. That's something that has given me a strong sense of community and giving back and is one of the core values that I embrace in my bid for Congress," she said.

Notably, Dalip Singh Saund was the first Indian American, a Sikh, to be elected to the US House of Representatives from 29th Congressional District of California. *—AP*

PVT FIRM SCRIPTS HISTORY

US returns to Moon for 1st time in over 50 years

WASHINGTON, 23 FEB

A private American company has scripted history by landing the first commercial spacecraft on the Moon as well as the first US vehicle on the Earth's only natural satellite in more than 50 years, joining earlier feats by India, Russia, the US and China.

Built by Intuitive Machines, the lander -- named Odysseus -- touched down on the Moon at around 6.23 pm on Thursday, making it the first American spacecraft on the Moon since the Apollo 17 mission in 1972.

The lander carries a bounty of NASA scientific instruments, "and bearing the dream of a new adventure in science, innovation and American leadership in space, well, all of that aced the landing of the lifetime," Bill Nelson, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Administrator said.

As the spacecraft made its final descent, mission controllers lost contact with it, as was expected to occur *PHOTO: X/INT_MACHINES*

As the spacecraft made its final descent, mission controllers lost contact with it, as was expected to occur, NBC News reported.

"After troubleshooting communications, flight controllers have confirmed Odysseus is upright and starting to send data," Intuitive Machines Chief Executive Officer Stephen Altemus said during the livestream.

The lander will have seven days before darkness descends on the landing site, preventing the spacecraft's solar panels from gathering energy from sunlight and bringing freezing temperatures, ABC News reported.

In August last year, India made history as its moon mission Chandrayaan-3 became the first to land in the uncharted south pole of the Earth's only natural satellite and became the fourth country to master the technology of soft-landing on the Moon, propelling it into an elite group of nations.

Intuitive Machines was one of several companies approved by NASA under Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) programme contracts to build private lunar landers that the federal space agency, among others, would use to send instruments into space, the report said.

Intuitive Machines CEO Steve Altemus said that the company's employees' names are engraved into the footer to stamp their names permanently on the lunar surface. NASA said the lander brings NASA science to the Moon's surface. "These instruments will prepare us for future human exploration of the Moon under #Artemis," it said.

The Wall Street Journal said the lander is carrying NASA research devices under a USD 118 million contract, which is part of its CLPS, as well as commercial cargo, including a sculpture project from artist Jeff Koons. "The company and its customers are expected to have about a week to run devices before lunar night sets over the site where Odysseus landed, rendering it inoperable," the daily reported. *—AP*

Rupee falls 8 paise to close at 82.93 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 23 FEB

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and depreciated by 8 paise to close at 82.93 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, tracking a strong American currency and muted trend in domestic equities.Forex traders said the Indian currency depreciated as foreign fund outflows weighed on the rupee.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.87 and finally settled at 82.93 (provisional) against the dollar, down by 8 paise from its previous close. During the day, the rupee witnessed a range-bound movement. It saw an intraday high of 82.84 and a low of 82.96 against the American currency.On Thursday, the rupee had settled at 82.85 against the US dollar.The Indian rupee depreciated on Friday on dollar demand from importers. Elevated crude oil prices also weighed on the rupee, said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was 0.05 per cent up at 104.00. *—PTI*

Gold slips ₹80; silver plummets ₹700

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Gold prices slipped Rs 80 to Rs 62,720 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid weak cues in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities.In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 62,800 per 10 grams.Silver also plummeted Rs 700 to Rs 74,500 per kilogram, while it had closed at Rs 75,200 per kg in the previous close."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 62,720 per 10 grams, down by Rs 80, taking bearish cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading lower at USD 2,019 per ounce, down by USD 8 from the previous close.Silver was also quoting lower at USD 22.60 per ounce, while it had ended at USD 23 per ounce. *—PTI*

Kia recalls 4,358 units of Seltos

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Kia India on Friday said it is voluntarily recalling 4,358 units of a petrol variant of its mid-sized sports utility vehicle Seltos to replace the electronic oil pump controller.The company is recalling Smartstream G1.5 Petrol Seltos with IVT transmission, manufactured between February 28 and July 13, 2023, the South Korean automaker said in a statement.The recall has been prompted by a potential error in the electronic oil pump controller, which may impact the performance of the electronic oil pump in the specified transmission variant, it added.The company said it has informed the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) about the voluntary recall initiative.Since the safety of car owners is a top priority, the company is proactively replacing the electronic oil pump controller in the affected units for a seamless ownership experience, the statement said.*—PTI*

Bandhan Bank appoints new CFO

KOLKATA, 23 FEB

The board of private lender Bandhan Bank approved the appointment of Rajeev Mantri as the chief financial officer (CFO) and key managerial personnel (KMP) with immediate effect.The bank said in a statement that Abhijit Ghosh will head the finance and accounts division of the bank and also be a part of the senior management.Mantri has been a veteran banker with over 25 years of experience in banking and finance across India, Singapore and UAE. In his last role, he was the CFO of Citi India cluster for three years. Prior to that, he was the CFO at TransUnion Cibil Limited, the statement said.*—PTI*

Byju's investors vote to oust CEO, his family

Vote not valid until K'taka HC hears CEO's plea

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

BYJU's Founder Byju Raveendran and his family stayed away from the EGM, calling it 'procedurally invalid' ***PHOTO: ANI***

Byju's shareholders on Friday voted unanimously for removing founder CEO Byju Raveendran and his family from the board over alleged "mismanagement and failures"at what was once India's hottest tech startup.

However, the outcome of the vote at the extraordinary general meeting (EGM) will not be applicable until 13 March, when the Karnataka High Court will next hear Raveendran's plea challenging the move by certain investors to call the meeting.

The High Court on Wednesday had refused to stay the EGM but stated that any resolution passed shall not be given effect till the next date of hearing. Raveendran and family own 26.3 per cent in the company.

Byju's in a statement, issued before the EGM results were declared, said it "?rmly declares that the resolutions passed during the recently concluded EGM - attended by a small cohort of select shareholders - are invalid and ineffective. The passing of the unenforceable resolutions challenges the rule of law at worst."

Ahead of the EGM, four out of the six investors, on Thursday evening filed an oppression and mismanagement suit against the management of the company in the Bengaluru bench of the NCLT, seeking declaring of founders, including CEO Byju Raveendran, as unfit to run the company, appointment of a new board, declaring the just-concluded rights issue as void and a forensic audit of accounts.

A Byju's spokesperson reacting to the news of suit being filed said the company has not received any formal intimation of any such petition. "Indian regulation stipulates due process for conducting an EGM, intimation of petitions being filed in NCLT, etc. But certain shareholders prefer to manufacture a media spectacle as opposed to following due process."

Sources said as per the process, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) will issue notices once the petition gets admitted. Byju's in its statement cited High Court order and said "coupled with numerous procedural irregularities and deficiencies, invalidates the resolutions passed by a select group of shareholders." Investors have also sought a forensic audit of the company in the plea filed before the NCLT on Thursday, according to a court filing. *—PTI*

TITAN, WIPRO MAJOR GAINERS

HCLTech, Asian Paints, Maruti, JSW Steel, TCS, SBI, ITC and Bharti Airtel were the major losers ***PHOTO: PTI***

Nifty closes below 22,200, Sensex near 73,100

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty edged lower in a volatile trade on Friday, reversing early gains due to selling in IT and select banking shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex slipped 15.44 points or 0.02 per cent to close at 73,142.80 points with 17 of its constituents closing in the red and 13 in the green.

The index opened higher but later slipped into losses due to profit-taking by investors. The barometer oscillated between a high of 73,413.93 and a low of 73,022 during the day.

The broader Nifty of NSE closed lower by 4.75 points or 0.02 per cent at 22,212.70 points as gains in FMCG, pharma and financial shares were offset by losses in IT and private bank shares.

The 50-share barometer scaled a record high of 22,297.50 in intra-day trade.

"Nifty opened higher but failed to sustain the morning momentum, leading to a closing at the day's low due to profit booking," Rupak De, Senior Technical Analyst, LKP Securities, said.

Among Sensex shares, HCLTech, Asian Paints, Maruti, JSW Steel, TCS, SBI, ITC and Bharti Airtel were the major losers.

On the other hand, Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, L&T and Wipro were the major gainers.

"The domestic market paused momentarily today after reaching another record high earlier in the day, driven by positive signals from global markets," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. *—PTI*

Amid Paytm crisis, Google to expand Soundpods

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

RBI clarified that Paytm QR code, Paytm Soundbox or Paytm POS terminal will continue to work after 15 March ***PHOTO: PTI***

Fintech firm Google Pay Thursday announced the expansion of soundpods for merchants across India to be executed over the next few months. The company introduced Soundpods last year in India on a limited pilot scale. Like Paytm's soundbox, Google Pay (GPay) soundpod is an audio notification service provided through a speaker device that alerts merchants after QR code payments.

"Last year, we introduced our SoundPod product in a limited pilot - an audio device that helps merchants track QR code payments with audio alerts when a payment is received. Participating merchants have shared positive feedback, noting it reduces checkout time. We're pleased to announce SoundPods will be available for small merchants across India over the coming months," Ambarish Lenge, Google Pay Vice President for product, said in a blog post.The development comes at a time when RBI has ordered Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) to stop accepting any money after March 15 for transactions.

RBI in the list of FAQs has clarified that Paytm QR code, Paytm Soundbox or Paytm POS terminal will continue to work after 15 March only if linked to other banks instead of PPBL. *—PTI*

Jio Services' shares hit 52-week high

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Market valuation of Jio Financial Services hit the Rs 2.2 lakh crore mark for the first time on Friday, as the company shares touched 52-week highs on the bourses.

This is the second firm of billionaire Mukesh Ambani-led RIL Group to reach the mcap of Rs 2.2 lakh crore.

The scrip of the company surged more than 10 per cent to Rs 331.25 apiece on the BSE.

In the intra-day trade, shares of Jio Financial Services rallied 14.50 per cent to hit a 52-week high of Rs 347 apiece on the bourse.

Also, the company's market valuation jumped Rs 27,922.69 crore to Rs 2,20,458.96 crore during the intra-day trade on the BSE.

Shares of Jio Financial Services rose nearly 15 per cent to reach a record high of Rs 347 apiece on the NSE and also marked its 52-week high level.

- **In the intra-day trade, shares of Jio Financial Services rallied 14.50 per cent to hit a 52-week high of Rs 347 apiece on the bourse**

In the mid-session trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose 59.02 points or 0.08 per cent to 73,217.26, while NSE Nifty gained 15.55 points to 22,233.

Earlier this month, the financial services arm of Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) clarified that it has not been in any negotiations to acquire Paytm wallet.

On 15 January, Jio Financial Services Ltd reported a 56 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 294 crore for the third quarter ended December 2023, compared to the previous quarter. *—PTI*

POST DEBACLE

NPCI asked to help Paytm ops

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Reserve Bank of India on Friday said NPCI has been asked to examine the possibility of it becoming a third party application provider for continued UPI operations of the Paytm app.

The central bank has barred Paytm Payments Bank from accepting further credits into its customer accounts and wallets after 15 March.With an aim to ensure seamless digital payments by UPI customers using '@paytm' handle operated by the Paytm Payments Bank, RBI said it has asked the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to examine the request to become a Third-Party Application Provider (TPAP) for UPI channel for continued UPI operation of the Paytm app.

For seamless migration of '@paytm' handle to other banks, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said NPCI may facilitate certification of 4-5 banks as Payment Service Provider (PSP) Banks with demonstrated capabilities to process high volume UPI transactions. *—PTI*

Yulu Bikes raises $19.25 M capital in equity funding

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Yulu currently runs 30,000 EVs across Bengaluru, Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Delhi and Gurugram ***PHOTO: PTI***

Electric bike-sharing platform Yulu Bikes on Friday said it has secured USD 19.25-million (Rs 160 crore) capital in equity funding through the issuance of shares to the company's existing strategic investors-- Magna and Bajaj Auto Ltd.

The capital infusion will enable Yulu to maintain its growth streak and will strengthen its market leadership as it expands its reach in terms of vehicles, operational locations, and product and technology innovation to keep up with the rise in demand from users, the company said in a statement.On Thursday, Bajaj Auto said in a regulatory filing that it has raised its stake in Yulu Bike to 18.8 per cent of the paid-up equity share capital with an additional Rs 45.75 crore investment in the company. The equity infusion will help the company fast-track its growth plans, said Amit Gupta, Co-founder &and CEO of Yulu.

"Yulu has seen demand speeding up in the last couple of quarters. In particular, our shared EV services have transformed the urban delivery landscape by increasing the share of green deliveries while enabling livelihoods," he added.The company will continue to strengthen its leadership in the mobility-as-a-service (MaaS) segment.Yulu currently runs 30,000 EVs across Bengaluru, Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Delhi and Gurugram. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

MARUT DRONES GETS PATENT FOR SEEDING DEVICE

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Telangana-based Marut Drones has received a patent for its innovative 'multi-nozzle seed dispensing device' for direct seeded rice using drones.

It is the world's first utility patent given for 20 years under the provisions of the Patents Act, 1970, the company said in a statement on Friday.

This patent recognises Marut's direct seeding rice drone, developed in collaboration with Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agriculture University (PJTSAU), which incorporates a multi-nozzle aerial seed dispensing device, it said.

With this patent, Marut Drones will facilitate the widespread adoption of direct seeding drones for rice cultivation at the grassroots level. *—PTI*

- **It is the world's first utility patent given for 20 years under the provisions of the Patents Act, 1970**

Vice Media to lay off several hundreds

BROOKLYN, 23 FEB

PHOTO: X

Vice Media plans to cut hundreds of jobs as it stops publishing on Vice.com, according to a memo from chief executive Bruce Dixon.

In May, the firm filed for bankruptcy in the US and was bought by Fortress Investment Group.

Dixon said Vice plans to "partner with established media companies to distribute our digital content".

Media firms including Channel 4, Los Angeles Times, and Business Insider have also cut jobs this year.

Dixon said "it is no longer cost-effective for us to distribute our digital content the way we have done previously," in the memo seen by the BBC.

"Regrettably, this means that we will be reducing our workforce, eliminating several hundred positions," he said.

The company continues to sell the business, according to Dixon who said the announcement will be made in the coming weeks.

Before filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, a procedure which postpones a US company's obligations to its creditors, Vice announced previous layoffs by shutting down its flagship TV programme.

The company was valued at $5.7bn (£4.5bn) in 2017 and was once heralded as part of vanguard of companies set to disrupt the traditional media landscape with edgy, youth-focused content spanning print, events, music, online, TV and feature films.

More recent content included documentaries about controversial influencer Andrew Tate and a film about Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, by actor Sean Penn.

However, the company's revenues have been flat for some years and it has also struggled to turn a profit.

Vice's plans to go public through a merger also failed. *—BBC News*

'India's trade pacts with EFTA positive'

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Successful conclusion of India's proposed trade agreements with the UK, Oman and four European nation bloc EFTA will reflect its commitment to trade liberalisation and economic integration at a time when the whole world is turning protectionist, according to a report.

Economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said the free trade agreements (FTAs) have become pivotal instruments for India's economic expansion and integration into the world market.

These nations and the bloc are eager to finalize these agreements before the upcoming general elections, GTRI said, adding the talks are on the verge of conclusion.Signing of these three agreements will take India's FTA tally from 13 to 16.Number of countries with comprehensive FTAs will go up from 22 to 28. In addition India has six small scope PTAs (preferential trade agreements).

Last pact was signed with Australia in March 2022."Everyone wants to do an FTA with India. The main reason for this is India's high import duties, which make it difficult for these countries to access India's large and rapidly growing market," the report said.

It said that in all the new FTAs, India is negotiating many non-trade areas such as sustainable development, digital, IPR, labour, and competition.

"India is reluctantly changing its earlier approach to focus only on traditional market access subjects like merchandise and services trade to also include new issues. Most new issues restrict policy space for domestic regulations by forcing adoption of developed country regulations," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

EFTA members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. *—PTI*

$60 M DEAL

Reddit strikes deal with Google for AI training data

SAN FRANCISCO, 23 FEB

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Reddit has struck a deal with Google that allows the search giant to use posts from the online discussion site for training its artificial intelligence models and to improve services such as Google Search. The arrangement, valued at roughly $60 million, will also give Reddit access to Google AI models for improving its internal site search and other features. Reddit declined to comment statement about the deal.

Separately, the San Francisco-based company announced plans for its initial public offering Wednesday. In documents filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Reddit said it reported net income of $18.5 million — its first profit in two years — in the October-December quarter on revenue of $249.8 million. The company said it aims to list its shares on the New York Stock Exchange under the ticker symbol RDDT.

The Google deal is a big step for Reddit, which relies on volunteer moderators to run its sprawling array of freewheeling topic-based discussions. Those moderators have publicly protested earlier Reddit decisions, most recently blacking out much of the site for days when Reddit announced plans to start charging many third-party apps for access to its content.The arrangement with Google doesn't presage any sort of data-driven changes to how Reddit functions, according to an individual familiar with the matter. This person requested anonymity in order to speak freely during the SEC-enforced "quiet period" that precedes an IPO. Unlike social media sites such as TikTok, Facebook and YouTube, Reddit does not use algorithmic processes that try to guess what users will be most interested in seeing next. Instead, users simply search for the discussion forums they're interested in and can then dive into ongoing conversations or start new ones.

The data-sharing arrangement is also highly significant for Google, which is hungry for access to human-written material it can use to train its AI models to improve their "understanding" of the world and thus their ability to provide relevant answers to questions in a conversational format. *—PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Salah's last-minute decision for the League Cup final

LIVERPOOL, 23 FEB

Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah's availability for the English League Cup final against Chelsea will be a last-minute decision, assistant manager Pep Lijnders said Friday. Two other key players — forward Darwin Nunez and midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai — are in similar spots with their respective injuries ahead of Sunday's match at Wembley Stadium."Dom, Darwin, and Mo we have to see, we have two more days — so today's session and tomorrow's session — and then last minute we will check if they can be there," Lijnders said at a news conference. Salah experienced muscle fatigue and didn't play in Liverpool's midweek win over Luton. He had injured his hamstring while on international duty with Egypt.—*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Musheer leads Mumbai's recovery with a 100

MUMBAI, 23 FEB

India U-19 World Cup star Musheer Khan came to Mumbai's rescue with his maiden first-class hundred as the hosts recovered from a precarious position to reach 248 for five on the opening day of their Ranji Trophy quarterfinal against Baroda, here Friday. The 18-year-old Musheer, who was among the leading run-scorers in the recently concluded U-19 World Cup in South Africa, was at the forefront of Mumbai's recovery and was jolted multiple times after electing to bat here at the BKC Ground. Musheer raised a well-calculated 128 not out off 216 balls, studded with 10 fours.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Squash: Abhay in Goodfellow Classic SF

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

India squash player Abhay Singh is in line for a second PSA Challenger Tour title in as many months after the 25-year-old advanced to the semifinals of the Goodfellow Classic squash in Toronto. Top-seeded Abhay beat Frenchman Maceo Levy 13-11, 11-7, 11-3 in 33 minutes in the quarterfinals, and will take on Abdelrahman Abdelkhalek of Egypt in the last-four stage.World No 66 Indian won the JSW Willingdon PSA event in Mumbai last month, following a memorable 2023 that saw him play the decider in the final against Pakistan and save two match points for India to clinch the men's team gold at the Hangzhou Asian Games.—*PTI*

India eye revenge against Australia in FIH Pro League

ROURKELA, 23 FEB

IThe Indian men's hockey team would look to leave behind the last match's disappointment and lift its game to the next level to stop the mighty Australians' unbeaten run in a FIH Pro League match here on Saturday.The Indians played some exciting hockey against world No.1 Netherlands in their last match but lost 2-4 in shoot-out after the game ended in a 1-1 stalemate. India is currently placed fourth in the standings with 11 points from six matches, while Australia is unbeaten so far.—*AP*

Root shunned 'Bazball' to save the day for Eng

India discovers new pace option in Akash Deep

RANCHI, 23 FEB

Joe Root did not bring out the sweep shot until he faced his 115th ball on a clement Friday at Ranchi and unleashed only a solitary reverse sweep while constructing a slow-burning hundred to save the day for England.

Root's unbeaten 106 off 226 balls, which was made at a strike rate of 46.90, was, perhaps, the most anti-Bazball innings that might have been played in the Brendon McCullum era.But then Root needed to rediscover that dogged Yorkie inside him for himself and the team.

He entered the fourth Test against India on the back of 29, 2, 5, 16, 18, 7 in his last Test innings and that 18 in the first innings at Rajkot might have hurt him deeply.

England were at a dominant 224 for two, well in sight of India's first innings total of 445. But Root decided to reverse lap Jasprit Bumrah for Yashasvi Jaiswal to pull off a smart catch at slip. His dismissal sparked an England collapse as the tourists were bundled out for 319, and India converted that lead into a record victory and a 2-1 series lead.

It sparked the discussion about the careless side of Bazball, and Root's 50-plus average during the McCullum reign was not good enough to slow down the wagging fingers at him.

The 33-year-old needed an innings of substance for that, and he had to return to his original batting ways. Ian Chappell, a cricketing master-brain, offered a similar thought."-Root had a bloody fine record playing normally, and he was a quick scorer playing normally.

India unearthed a fresh pace talent in debutant **Akash Deep** but veteran Joe Root single-handedly kept England afloat with a tenacious hundred that shunned 'Bazball' for a more conservative approach as the visitors hobbled to 302 for 7 on the opening day of the fourth Test here on Friday. The 27-year-old Bengal pacer, who hails from Bihar, picked up three wickets in his 17 overs, marking yet another confident debut for the home side in the ongoing series.

Earlier, India's good run with debutants continued as pacer Akash Deep, the fourth newcomer for the hosts in this series, showed promise for this level.

Bowling one of the finest maiden spells in a Test debut 7-0-24-3 Akash Deep dismissed Ben Duckett (11), Ollie Pope (0), and Zak Crawley (42) in 10 deliveries while bowling from the dressing room end.

England 302 for 7 (Root 106*, Robinson 31*, Akash 3-70, Siraj 2-60) vs India.

—*PTI*

England's Joe Root celebrates his century on the first day of the fourth Test cricket match between India and England, at the JSCA International Stadium Complex, in Ranchi

PHOTO: PTI

Mohammed Siraj celebrates with Shubman Gill

PHOTO:PTI

Akash Deep celebrates Zak Crawley's wicket

PHOTO:PTI

BHAGAT, KADAM REACH SEMIFINALS

PATTAYA, 23 FEB

Pramod Bhagat and Sukant Kadam on Friday reached the semifinals of the Para-Badminton World Championship to assure themselves of at least a medal here.Bhagat defeated France's Mathieu Thomas 21-15, 21-17 to set up a semifinal clash with compatriot Manoj Sarkar.Kadam got the better of Nigeria's Chigozie Jeremiah Nnanna 21-13, 21-11. He will take on Indonesia's Fredy Setiawan in the semifinal. —*AP*

Ranji Trophy: Karnataka slip to 90 for 6

SURAT, 23 FEB

The stuttering Karnataka batters squandered the advantage given by their bowlers,slipping to 90 for six at the close of play on the first day of their Ranji TrophyElite Group C match against Railways here on Friday. However, the Karnataka bowlershad a good day in the park, bundling out Railways for 155. Pacer Vasuki Koushik(3/22) and 17-year-old left-arm spinner Hardik Raj (3/28) derailed Railways.

During their reply, theKarnataka batters' focus was taken away a bit by the absence of their prolific-captain Mayank Agarwal after he was ruled out of this match. Agarwal could not travelto Surat as he felt a burning sensation in his mouth and throat after accidentallyconsuming a spurious liquid from a pouch during his flight out of Agartala acouple of days back. He is recovering in Bengaluru. Without Agarwal's solidpresence, Karnataka's top-order caved in against left-arm spinner Akash Pandey,who took three for 21.

Brief Scores: At Surat: Railways 155 all out Singh 56,Saif 45;400Vasuki Koushik 3/22, Hardik Raj 3/28) vs Karnataka 90/6 in 27.5 overs KV Aneesh 27.

Australia goes 2-0 up and takes an unassailable lead against New Zealand

PHOTO: AFP

Australia flattens NZ to seal T20I series

AUCKLAND, 23 FEB

Australia has retained the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy after a superb bowling effort, defending 174 for a 72-run win at Eden Park that clinches the three-game T20 series.

Only Travis Head (45 off 22) and Pat Cummins (28 off 22), in at eight to steady the ship, impressed with the bat on Friday night.

It mattered not as an understrength Black Caps side never got going in their chase, held to 102 by a ferocious Aussie attack.

Josh Hazlewood (1-12 off four) claimed the key wicket of opener Finn Allen in the first over, before producing a rare T20 maiden in the powerplay.

New Zealand already without Kane Williamson and Daryl Mitchell didn't risk Rachin Ravindra due to a sore knee and were beset by further bad fortune.

Opener Devon Conway wasn't able to bat after a wicketkeeping injury which forced him to hand over the gloves to Allen and sent him to the hospital for scans during New Zealand's innings. As the Black Caps attempted a salvage job from 4-29, Adam Zampa (4-34 off four) then bowled Josh Clarkson and Adam Milne in consecutive balls to scuttle their chances.

Glenn Phillips (42 off 35) was their best, attempting to anchor the innings before becoming Zampa's third victim, caught at long-on.

Powered by Head (45 off 22), Australia raced to 2-103 off eight overs and looked set for a monster total.

From that point, they collapsed, with the returning Steve Smith among the failures. The 34-year-old made an unconvincing 11 before falling lbw to the stellar Lockie Ferguson (4-12 off 3.5 overs) on a night where most batters struggled.

The game-two stroll was a sharp contrast to the opener in Wellington, won by Australia when David conjured a last-ball four.

Australia 174 (Head 45, Ferguson 4-12, Sears 2-29) beat New Zealand 102 (Phillips 42, Zampa 4-34, Ellis 2-16) by 72 runs.

—*AP*

- New Zealand suffered another injury blow when wicket-keeper-batter Devon Conway was struck on his left thumb during the second T20I against Australia on Friday.

Actors Shah Rukh Khan, Varun Dhawan, Shahid Kapoor and others with the captains of WPL teams Smriti Mandhana (Royal Challengers Bangalore), Harmanpreet Kaur (Mumbai Indians), Meg Lanning (Delhi Capitals), Beth Mooney (Gujarat Giants), Alyssa Healy (UP Warriorz) during the opening ceremony of Women's Premier League 2024, at M Chinnaswamy Stadium, in Bengaluru on Friday

PHOTO: PTI

Iga Swiatek edges closer to Doha-Dubai double

DUBAI, 23 FEB

Iga Swiatek PHOTO: AFP

Iga Swiatek is one step closer to claiming a rare Doha-Dubai double thanks to a convincing 6-3, 6-2 quarter-final victory over Chinese sixth seed Zheng Qinwen on Thursday in the UAE. The world number one, who lifted the trophy in Doha for a third consecutive time last Saturday, extended her unbeaten streak to seven matches and is looking to become the first woman since 2007, and just the third overall, to win both Gulf tournaments in the same season.In what was their sixth meeting in 20 months, Swiatek came up clutch when she needed to as she improved to a perfect 6-0 lifetime against Zheng."I'm happy that I played well, stuck to my tactics, was pretty solid. For sure I feel better and better every day here," said Swiatek, who was a finalist in Dubai 12 months ago.The Polish top seed will next take on Russian world number 40 Anna Kalinskaya, who upset world number three and reigning US Open champion Coco Gauff 2-6, 6-4, 6-2.An early break of serve was enough for Swiatek to secure the opening set. —*AP*

Sarita bags bronze in Asian Track Cycling

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Sarita Kumari showcased her talent in the junior women's category, securing a bronze medal in the final race while clocking 36.966 seconds in the Asian Track Cycling Championships here on Friday.

India also bagged two golds and a silver medal in the para category but Sarita's bronze-medal performance was the highlight of the day.

Displaying a lot of determination in the qualifying round, Sarita clocked 36.912 seconds to secure a spot in the final and went on to win the medal.

"It's an incredible feeling to clinch the bronze medal in the junior women's category.

The journey has been filled with hard work, dedication, and the unwavering support of my coaches and teammates," said Sarita.

"This medal belongs to everyone who has believed in me and supported me along the way," she added.

—*PTI*

Tvesa Malik clinches maiden international title

SUN CITY, 23 FEB

Indian golfer Tvesa Malik, who has time and again come close to clinching her first international title, finally got the monkey off her back with a three-shot win in the SuperSport Ladies Challenge, the opening event of the Sunshine Ladies Golf Tour in South Africa, here on Friday.

Tvesa became the second Indian after Diksha Dagar to win in South Africa. —*AP*

Schopman resigns as chief coach

NEW DELHI, 23 FEB

Indian women's hockey team chief coach Janneke Schopman resigned on Friday, days after creating a furor by claiming that she was not valued and respected enough by the national federation.

The Dutch coach had taken over the reins of the women's team in 2021 from Sjoerd Marine, who had led the side to a historic fourth position at the Tokyo Olympics.

Schopman's contract was to end in August this year after the Paris Olympics but following her recent critical comments, it was expected that she won't continue. —*PTI*

Indian women's hockey team chief coach Janneke Schopman PHOTO: PTI

AC Milan overcame a spirited Rennes 5-3 on aggregate despite a 3-2 loss at Roazhon Park. PHOTO: AFP

AC Milan, Benfica reach Europa League last 16

MADRID, 23 FEB

AC Milan overcame a spirited Rennes 5-3 on aggregate despite a 3-2 loss in Thursday's play-off round second leg to reach the Europa League last 16, where they will be joined by fellow former European champions Benfica and Marseille.

Benjamin Bourigeaud scored a hat-trick for Rennes, including a pair of penalties, but goals from Luka Jovic and Rafael Leao ensured Milan were never really in danger of blowing a 3-0 lead from the first leg. Benfica also saw off French opposition as a 0-0 draw away to Toulouse was enough to send the Portuguese side through following their 2-1 victory in last week's first leg in Lisbon.

Lens, who dropped down from the Champions League into the knockout play-off round, became the third French club to go out after Freiburg fought back from two goals down to win 3-2 after extra time.

David Pereira da Costa and Elye Wahi put Lens in control of the tie following a goalless opening leg, but Roland Sallai struck twice to force extra time in Germany.

Michael Gregoritsch grabbed the winner in the 99th minute for Freiburg.

Marseille kept French interest in the competition alive as they came from behind to beat Shakhtar Donetsk 5-3 on aggregate after a 3-1 victory at the Velodrome.

Georgiy Sudakov stroked home a penalty early in Marseille before the hosts replied via Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's record-setting 31st Europa League goal.

Ismaila Sarr fired Marseille ahead on 74 minutes and Geoffrey Kondogbia added a late third on Jean-Louis Gasset's debut as coach after the departure of Gennaro Gattuso. —*AP*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Man City, Arsenal look to close title gap

LONDON, 23 FEB

With Liverpool in League Cup final action against Chelsea on Sunday, the chasing pack has a chance to close the gap on the Premier League leaders. Manchester City can move within one point of Jurgen Klopp's team if they win their game in hand at Bournemouth, while Arsenal must beat Newcastle to stay in touch with the title pacesetters. AFP Sport looks at three talking points ahead of this weekend's action:

Declan Rice has urged Arsenal to use the frustration from their surprise Champions League last-16 first-leg loss at Porto to fuel their bid for Premier League glory.

The Gunners returned from Portugal empty-handed after Galeno's stoppage-time strike gave the hosts a 1-0 victory on Wednesday.

While the disappointment will linger until the second leg on March 12, England midfielder Rice knows Arsenal cannot afford a Champions League hangover.

Mikel Arteta's third-placed side will be just two points behind Liverpool if they beat Newcastle at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday, but a defeat would be a major blow to their bid for a first title since 2004.

"Look, we have lost games this year and drawn games, and I have seen the changing room after and it's been really bad," said Rice, whose side has won their past five league games.

—*AP*

Haaland silenced his critics with a priceless winner against Brentford

PHOTO: AFP

- With Liverpool in League Cup final action against Chelsea on Sunday, the chasing pack has a chance to close the gap on the Premier League leaders.